

TBS&E 33

In the end all we have
left is today, tomorrow
and regrets.

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December 2008 to March 2009

Editorial

Things have not been so good of late at work.

At work I have suffered a re-structure that has ended my distinct role at work for a position in a 'Clerical Pool'. Consequently, for all of February I have been 'off line' as far as ANZAPA, Futurian and Freecon initiatives are concerned, due to involvement in physically re-organising the office, sorting other people's effects and shifting them to their new positions about the floor. I expect that this brief Gafiation will come back to bite me on the bum before long. Long hours and physically exhausting shifting other people's stuff to their new places, before I got to organise my own. Being in 'the pool' is frustrating, as frequently I now have to attempt to follow exasperatingly unclear or poorly explained / thought out directions. In the past I would be asked to do something, have the problem explained to me (as I was not 'their' clerical) and largely left to solve the problem. The thing is that when each sub-unit had it's own clerical, the clerical was a party to planning, knew what was happening and how best to do things, help from the other clericals was available on request, now it's all 'pool' not every body understands what our supervisors are asking for / talking about. 'Management' has rarely been a talent among the teacher trained and it shows, with the 'Under \$50 K' clericals feeling a lot more stressed than the 'over \$50 K' Education Officers. There is also no chance of career progression, so I'm going to die / retire as a Clerical one / two, bottom of the pay scale heap as far as wages / retirement benefits go.

The Book Group Meetings - Of late, probably because of the end of year run down, you will see I have been attending some Non SF related book meetings, this has

been more out of curiosity than out of any sense of changing the direction of what I read. Adding a dozen or so book group choices to the fifty or so books I seem to be reading (and reviewing) each year seems sustainable. If anything, it has been detrimental to my respect for Capital L 'Literature', as seen up close it doesn't always compare well with some of the better SF I can recall reading, grinding descriptions of places and situations that do not appeal as much as the open and expansive vistas offered by SF and some better Fantasy!

My Mother – As you may know my Mother has some health issues, nothing major or greatly troubling but attending half hour mid-day medical appointments with mother has wiped out about three months worth of potential days off work. On a more positive note, I have just recently persuaded Mother to start writing down some history / stories she has heard, initially just random topics and instances, one thing to a page, but so far my write-ups of these are approaching eight pages. The process is similar to my mode of writing up SF meeting notes in that it takes me about two or three hours to write up and flesh out one hour or so of Mum's rough notes. The immediate aim of this is to put together a coherent booklet of mother's memories in time for a Queens Birthday weekend family gathering, the reason why I am considering attending the NZ Natcon, but not the Australian one! I suppose I really should make plans to go to this year's Melbourne SF con, if for no other reason but to grok the scene ahead of the 2010 Worldcon. We will just have to see.

Something of an Index

Red Pages

Pages 1 to 4 – **Editorial, Mailing Comments & my reading during 2008**

Green Pages

Pages 5 to 11 – **Book Group meeting notes**

Pages 11 and 12 – **Book Group Book Reviews**

Blue Pages

Pages 13 to 15 – **Science and Astronomy, Sydney City Skywatchers meetings, The Leviathan of Parson's Town and Finding the Size of the Universe with SUSI**

Page 16 – **Science Book Reviews**

Yellow Pages – SF&F meeting notes

Pages 17 to 23 – **Futurian, Infinitas discussion meetings of plus one Dr Who Tavern night**

Pages 23 to 26 – **Book Reviews (mostly SF)**

White Pages

Pages 27 and 28 – **Random Notes, Traveller's Tales and Basenj's Tail Piece**

Mailing Comments on ANZAPA mailing Number 247.

This issue's subtitle refers to my sense of defeat and anguish about thwarted plans to go back, read and comment on all of last year's ANZAPA mailings. During December I got about a third of the way through before I was hit by some of the events described in the Editorial.

On the Other hand, this weekend, Friday night to Sunday afternoon, being the beginning of the third week of the month (Wednesday, Campsie book group, Thursday Infinitas book review meeting, Friday, Sydney Futurians) and after I had managed to write up to date the last of the February and First week of March meeting notes, I had a window of opportunity to have a '**Convention for one**', that is to say to sit down with a schooner of tea and read through all of mailing 247 and then sit down with a schooner of Red to do these mailing comments.

To save multiple repetitions, thank you all for your comments of support for the 2008 Sydney Freecon and your commiserations on the demise of Mystique. Each now pass into memory with the hope of more for the future.

If your newsletter title is in bold then I'm replying to your comments.

1. Official Bloody Organ - **Bruce Gillespie**

Very impressed by the cover art for this issue, I could not help but be distracted by the books on display and spent some time trying to read the spines. Last I heard Claire took a job transfer to Perth, and the implications of this move and a new position might be a reason for her silence.

2. Vile Experiments 2 - **Zara Baxter and Gene Melzack**

Dear Gene - thank you for making it clear, Gene as in Gene, I had been worried that your name was pronounced as 'Jennifer' (or possibly even 'Juniper'). Ashfield seems to be becoming a SF fan ghetto, beyond ANZAPANS I am aware of a few Freecon attendees coming from that part of Sydney and I have considered holding a weekend - daylight 'Reprise' Sydney Futurian meeting nearby, i. e. re-discussing three or four Sydney Futurian meeting topics on a Saturday or a Sunday at a local library (or similar) meeting room over three or four hours.

Dear Zara - I can agree with your sentiments on convention going, the idea of giving up a day to travel to, a day to return and a day to recover is a major factor why I tend not to go to interstate conventions. Organising Freecons, a SF&F experience and sleeping in my own bed is I find a very compelling attraction!

3. Quoz 13 - **Claire Brierly & Mark Plummer**

You are quite right, running the Freecons has given me a very perspective on what is possible / desirable in a SF&F convention. I'm very much aware of the difference between program and audience experience and I would like to think that the Freecon mixture goes some way to recognising this, you can never get everyone 'on the same page', I guess even a one program track Freecon with only 20 something members is really about Pi number of separate self managing events happening at once. Yes, dog owning is something of an obligation and a responsibility. If Amber is to be replaced (circa 2016?), I think I would need to have a 'wife' to make it possible as a dog needs more than one 'parent'.

Mass issues - Mark me down as 130 kg, far too much I know. I suspect that if there was to be a fundraising ANZAPA nude calendar it would have to be printed on A3 rather than A4.

(Now that's an idea for a membership drive!).

Impressed by the volume and detail of your mailing comments, tag team effect I suppose.

4. Bloody Bored Student - **Duncan Campbell**

I haven't bothered to see 'The Day the Earth Stood Still', list comment hear has been mixed. I do note however that it seems to have lasted longer on a local (Campsie) billboard than it did at the cinemas. As a 'Bloody Bored Student' I'm surprised that you didn't get the point of Cloaca No. 5 and it's merchandising. Clearly it is engineered and designed to produce the gift option that satisfies an ongoing need for people who otherwise couldn't give a Sh*t.

5. No Time for cobwebs - **Glen Crawford**

Hope things work out well for Charlee, she sounds like an exceptional child. Your symptoms sound a bit like mine before medication for hypertension (Micardis) last time I saw a doctor he was of the view that I'm on the borderline of not needing medication, but while my blood pressure may be very close to satisfactory I find that without it my quality of life would be poor. Equally, A 20 minute walk of even a half a tin of Salmon for lunch can raise me from 'George Bush' levels on imbecility to 'SF writing potential'. It all has something to do with blood vessel dilation and blood viscosity, may not show up on routine medical check up stats, but I know which place I'd rather my mind was at. Experimentation with blood / brain chemistry can be surprisingly rewarding, or so I have found.

6. Spider Flower Kobwebs - **John and Dianne Fox**

It seems we are bretheren in adversity, have been having 'house guest' issues, the neighbour's mice keep visiting. A neighbour's backyard clearance of built up undergrowth leads to a wave of mice moving on to the next best place, as has the Sydney heatwave or sustained rain. I have collected half a dozen from traps over the past few months - and still they come! Amber seems to be 'too posh to pounce', or too well fed!

7. *BRG* 57 - **Bruce Gillespie**

Insightful articles on 'fans I have not known'. Letters at the back interesting to read.

8. Last minute Musings - **Karen Gory**

A very long and deeply introspective list of points, far more than I would be comfortable about explicitly stating although quite a few of them I could claim for my self, which ones? I guess you would have to watch what I say and do to form your own opinions. Good to see that you are being systematic about both weight loss and exercise, one without the other only makes for temporary advances and then crushing reversals

9. Bookmark 17 - **Michael F Green**

Doggy photos I will look into, technological insufficiency prevents for the moment. I defer to your greater experience in the matter of pornography I have heard that much of what is 'professional' is repetitive and for that reason unsatisfying, possibly resulting in the reason for such items as the infamous 'One night in Paris (Hilton)' tape. I expect it is much easier to depict 'the act' than it is to falsely depict emotional involvement, although I expect that nearly everyday someone somewhere is trying to re-invent pornography? Analysis of Religion in order to

determine the mind of Ghod is always likely to lead to confusion. Whatever the 'real' history of Scriptures, lacking the context in which they were written denies any real basis to have an objective opinion on what the message is supposed to be. Good and self convinced Christians were to be found on either side of the issues that lead to the abolition of Slavery (in the British Empire, coz we had Indians and Egyptians to pick our cotton?), Scripture was freely quoted at the time.

10. Necessity 86 - Jack R. Herman

Balkanised SF Fandom in Sydney? Who would be the Young Turks of Sydney SF then? My word! If only things were so highly organised something more together might be organised! As I see them, Freecons are organised as 'Something for Readers, Viewers, Writers and Would-be Writers of SF&F', what they deliver is more of a consolation prize for the (fewer or shyer) book reading type of SF&F fan, coz their ain't much else on offer for them. WWF wrestler 'personalities' will probably trump 'Writers' at Sydney's Supa Nova event this year, and Graphic Novels ahead of 'written word' authors. With one room and a pocket change convention budget I reach for the 'market' that is not otherwise being serviced.

11. From the Lair of the Lynx 52 - LynC

I am relieved on your behalf that a settlement of Clive's estate is near. Aspects of my Brother's estate seemingly remain unresolved, partly due to the impenetrability of US business practice. Might your green thing be good British woad? The evening was very much a 'learning experience' the next one will be heaps easier and calmer to organise. I think everyone had a good time, the proof of the matter will be it's repeat this year, probably the weekend before Worldcon? If people agree to a rematch I guess it would have been a success. On the smoking issue I feel very little reason to be more welcoming, 'just a smoke', one evening at my place would mean living with the consequences for weeks, could you tolerate a 'friend' who drops round for 'just a drink' if it meant you were picking glass out the carpets for weeks afterwards? I get the shakes and the nausea 20 minutes afterwards if a smoker sits near me on the bus during a ten minute ride to the railway station.

12. Panopticon 52 - Dan McCarthy

Dear Dan have you considered placing four of the 2 by 6 foot bookcases on a wooden shipping pallet, with a sturdy trolley wheel bolted on each corner of the pallet. A strap (luggage from travel good store) around the top and middle to make it a rigid tardis like self supporting square 'double cube' book storage facility. This way you could have an additional large wall of bookshelves, at the centre of a room, shovable onto a wall or behind a door when guests arrive, walk around it or (with effort) turn it. This is the basis of the 'monster' in my garage, rather more than 12 linear metres of bookshelf in a door arc.

Mysti was a part of my life. We all need someone/something to care for and at the time Mystique was that. I'm more concerned about my Mother these days, so Amber will never quite fill that role, also she is very much (and increasingly so) Mother's dog these days, which is all for the better. As I write this (at 20 minutes after

midnight) Amber is probably 'guarding' Mother's bedroom while she sleeps.

13. 14 & 15. Playing Cage Symphonies on a two string Ukulele / All Club Mini-convention / Convention Calendar 2009 - Murray MacLachlan

Ah a truly Gnostic text, with differing meanings to the beholder depending on their level of initiation into the Mystery? I cannot remotely compete with your list of music listened to. I have records and tapes but seldom have the opportunity or time to listen to them, instead I tend to have radio national on to fill the ringing silences with news and current affairs etc. I'm grateful for your 2009 Convention calendar, the 'all on one page' bit saves me a bit of down loading and transcribing. No mention / space for the 2009 Sydney Freecon though and the dates for the 2010 NZ Natcon rather complicate my plans for a 2010 Freecon.

16. Land of 10,000 Loons - Jeanne Mealy

Appreciate your 'centre of a cold continent' contributions, although I do have to stop and make F to C temperature calculations to get the sense of some of what you are saying.

17. Sparrow Grass and Battle Twigs 11 - Roman Orszanski

Nice pictures, I note the progress with your son, the Darth Vader / Luke Skywalker moment can't be far off 'Come, turn to the Fannish side and together we can rule the Fandom Universe'.

18. YRKYHWYFAWIYB 121 - Cath Ortlieb

Gads! Even more pictures of cats. I'm surprised by the spontaneity of the decision making to just get a new cat or an additional cat. There is no way that I could just go and get additional dogs, Amber and Mysti at the same time was probably something I would never do again. I observe the level of commitment that ANZAPAN cat owners exhibit once they own a (new) cat, but it would seem that dog owning is a more monogamous deal.

19 & 20. Far 2 and Canal 2 - Marc Ortlieb

As SF fandom as we know it is pretty much dead in Sydney, so the SF fannish behavior of most people attending Sydney Freecons is probably only a secondary or tertiary interest to them. I expect they are gamers, bloggers, Writers and all that but not principally through SF fandom as such. The appearance of a charismatic 'set' could re-crystallise something like Melbourne SF fandom, the people could be tempted by the offer of a better social circle than currently is available in the other 'fandoms', but this extra effort is beyond my horizons. Send us **Jack Dann** and a committee load of West Australian SF fans and something might emerge. John Maizels has a weekly 7.30 am Friday morning radio program on 2MBSFM. He and his wife are the symptomatic of the sort of people who would go to a traditional Sydney SF convention if one were available, but time and other commitments mean that they are more likely to go to a Worldcon (and do some business on the side) rather than a Natcon.

21. The Unfortunate - Spike

Sorry No suitable comments come to mind on your mailing comments to others.

22. Ytterbium 85 - Alan Stewart

I noted with interest the photo of a 'no guns / no knives' sticker. I understand that an internationally important artist was maced and handcuffed at an American airport recently. Apparently 'Peace Officers' saw that he had a writing pad and thought that he might be about to draw a gun - can't be too careful? The tickets from your city's dysfunctional public transport operator continue to put to shame the tickets of my city's dysfunctional public transport operator. As for the Kit Kats, there is sure to be a market Niche for an international 'all flavours' Internet Kit Kat provider. You might as well fill it! Sorry, no matches with your list of reading.

To maintain the 'Convention for one' theme; It is now Monday morning and only two more newsletters to comment on, a 'dead dog party' so to speak? News of this morning is that my mass reads at 127 kg, not the result of any great amount of exercise, more likely to be the result of getting an adequate amount of sleep Friday night to Sunday afternoon.

23. Interstellar Ramjet Scoop - Bill Wright

I'm very conscious that the program must be considered only the jumping off point for the Freecon rather than 'What goes'. There is a great value in program elasticity including 'adjusted time'. I wish we could do more for Meteor Inc. Even with the number of new contacts turned up by the 2008 Freecon I still think that it's only reaching a small fraction of the potential audience.

Your description of the Stanley Weinbaum story sounds authentically Weinbaumian, although I do not recall that story in the Stanley Weinbaum Anthology I have read recently (got two copies actually).

I noticed the artwork with a 'Writer's reality Cheque' theme. I have noticed some news of Copyright / publishing territoriality changes and the pros and cons debated by Writers, Publishers and mainstream Booksellers. How needy and pale is their faith in the value of their own efforts compared to the Writers, Publishers and Booksellers of SF&F that we know, frequently all three activities carried on by the one person coz the 'Mainstream' only deals with Grants, Award Winners and Best sellers of the approved forms of 'Literature'.

24. Les Chattes Parties 99 - Sally Yeoland

Three Cats! Yes in retrospect, having Amber and Mystique together was an error I'm unlikely to want to repeat, but Amber became available and there was hope of the Rose Bengal treatment being both available and successful. I was very much looking toward the possibilities with hope rather than calculating the probabilities. As I've mentioned elsewhere in the comments I'm surprised how relatively 'no big deal' it is to add an extra cat to a household. I do see people walking 'swarms' of dogs, but beyond a pair of well matched Basenjis I really can't see how more than two dogs is responsible dog ownership, unless you are intent on breeding. I would love the idea of coming home to the greeting of a loving Basenjis scrum, but that just isn't going to happen, at least not in this incarnation.

Commisseration over the End of Work Place Saga, I hope that it is over for you, I have some understanding of what you and the rest of your colleagues had to put up with. My experience of an office psychopath wasn't as drawn out or as personal, but I really can't watch 'The Office' US or UK version, coz it just ain't that funny after you've seen the real thing.

Overview - looking over all the contributions for this issue my first impression was that everyone else seems to be living richer and far more luminous lives than I can manage, achievements piled on achievements, each month! But then I stopped to consider the 'Silent Quorum'. The 24 newsletters listed for mailing # 247 were from 19 households, some newsletters being tag team / couple's efforts etc. But we are 28 addresses, so by mailing this effort I am at least 'ahead' of last mailing's 'No-Shows'?

Petition - I humbly and earnestly petition the President and the Bloody Editor of ANZAPA to right a grievous wrong and to put out the call - That the very Next new ANZAPA member **must** be a dog owner, or at least a dog sympathiser. On behalf of the Non-cat owning minority and in the interests of pet choice balance among members I request that an **affirmative action** policy be instituted without delay. To do otherwise would seem discriminatory?

What I can recall reading during 2008

Issues of the Fortean Times & the Australian Skeptic

The Victorian Internet - Non Fiction

Harry Turtledove's World War - Homeward Bound - Alt Hist SF

Enormous Boobs - Urban Myth Collation

The Templars - Non Fiction, Religious History

Damien Broderick's The Sea's Furthest End - SF Anthology

When William Came - Edwardian Alt history SF Anth.

Pleasant Avenue, The Sand man book

James Blish Dracula Unbound - Time travel SF

The Janus Equation - SF?

Leigh Brackett's The Big Jump - SF Anthology

Harry Harrison's The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the world - Time travel SF

Chester Porter QC,s The Conviction of the Innocent - Non Fiction, Legal history

Margo Lanagan's White Time - Spec Fiction Anth.

Gillian Rubenstein's Galax Arena - SF

Sian's The Floating Brothel - Non Fiction, Aust Colonial History

Bruno Bouchet's Labrats in Space - Children's SF

Leo Kelleher's Red Heart - Children's SF

Ghenghis Khan, Life, Death and Resurrection - Non Fiction, Chinese History

Kurt Vonnegut's Hocus Pocus - Speculative Fiction

Fred Saberhagen's Steel Shiva - Berserker SF

John Birmingham's World War 2.3 Designated Targets - SF

Bill Congreve's The Mullet that Screwed John West

Jerry Sienfield's Sien Language - US Humour?

Brian Stableford's Swan Song - SF

Route 66 AD - History of tourism in Roman times

Richard Morgan's The Steel Remains - Fantasy
A. E. Van Vogt's Earth's Last Fortress - SF
Three Eyes - ?
Brian Aldiss' The Empire of Fear - Alt History SF
Tom Disch's Echo Round his bones - SF
Vaughan's Human Stock - Post Apocalypse Dystopia
Donald Thomas' Belladonna - Victorian Crime /
 Detective story with Lewis Carroll
Algis Budrys's Who? - SF

Garry's Notes from the discussion of **Ben Bova's** 'The Aftermath', at the December 8, 2008 **Earlwood Library Book Club meeting** **A meeting held at 6.30 pm on the Second Monday of each month.**

Seven people attended, 4 women and 3 Men including myself and the library representative / group organiser. All the attendees were 'local'. The Earlwood Library book club is a 'book of the month' type discussion group. They have an eclectic / cross genre list of books selected in advance. This meeting was only my second visit to this group (notes?). There are also similar meetings held Campsie (Main) branch library. As a branch of the Canterbury Municipal library System the library attempts through inter library borrowing to make available a copy of the book to each member of the discussion group, a meeting format which at times causes some difficulties. As I was a bit rushed, I had only managed to do a single page review of part of **Vladimir Nabokov's** 'Lolita' (see my book reviews?). This review covered only the first 45 pages of the book. I was delayed by work and public transport so I was late to arrive at the meeting and on arrival I discovered that no-one else had read the book! In fact the reading choice had been changed at some point to **Ben Bova's** 'The Aftermath', a reliable SF writer that I would have been very happy to read instead of 'Lolita'! The reason for this late change was that the library had been unable to source sufficient copies of 'Lolita' for issue to meeting members. Anticipating something like this, I had obtained my copy from the SMSA library. The following notes then are only a partial account of the reader's impressions of 'The Aftermath'. A point worth noting that these are reactions from readers who are largely unfamiliar with SF genre writing, and in some cases, quite averse to SF&F!

Reader's Impressions

- The book is a sequel to a previous book and it is set in the Asteroid belt.
- The story runs around a family in Space, much of the book being concerned with 'Mundane' domestic dramas, lots of in-family bickering etc., rather than 'Sci-Fi' special effects.
- However, one character is a clone of her Mother, there is a Cyborg character and the story concerns the discovery of an artefact of unknown and presumed to be Alien origin.
- Another 'Sci-Fi' element in the book is that one character apparently indulges in Virtual Reality (VR) pornography. Now fancy that, no 'Warp Drive' technology, but teenage

sex drive survives the journey into the outer Solar System in the future!

- The date of these adventures is not explicitly stated, but there is an incidental reference to the events of the book taking place 'Two Centuries after **Jules Verne**', When **Jules Verne** wrote or the setting of **Jules Verne's** stories is left up to the reader. This IS a very sensible thing to do given that Scientific progress and SF' prediction seldom advance in lock step?

- According to the characters of this book, Earth is 'Finished', Environment depleted and struck by Cataclysms etc.. Space is the Place for the characters in this book! This might be true, or it might be only a subjective opinion held by the space dwelling sub-culture that this family is a member of. - There are scavenging 'Space Pirates' and some of the book is spent in 'humanising' these characters, rather than just depicting them as evil and parasitical of decent Space folk some of the book explains their viewpoint and experiences, explaining how they came to be. There are in fact no Evil characters in this book. Some character's actions are 'bad', but it seems they had bad lives and their actions are their only means of survival (apparently).

- One criticism made of this book was that Scavenger attacks occur too frequently and escapes are too close to be entirely credible.

NB this book is in fact an off shoot of a multi-book project that **Ben Bova** has been working on for some years, i.e. a second 'Asteroids' book. He is (still?) writing a series of SF books, each story being set on a planet (including Asteroids, Comets and the Oort Cloud etc. as 'planets') starting from the Sun and working his way out into the cold far reaches of the Heliopause? I believe that the Author is still working on this series and perhaps current and future Astronomical developments might keep him at work on this for many years / light years to come?
 Did you know that I went to High School with **Ben Bova**?

Book choices for 2009 were discussed, a list of a dozen or so was drawn up (see Canterbury Library website for details I guess?). There are unlikely to be many SF&F books on this list. Which ones will be selected will probably be influenced by library user responses. There was some discussion about an aversion to overly long books (quite understandable) and my suggestion for the library to draw up a master list of books held in sufficient copies to allow for book club issue.

- I was able to successfully propose that '1984' should be discussed during 2009, as 2009 marks both the 50th anniversary of it's publication and the death of It's Author **George Orwell**.

Consequently **'1984'** will be discussed on **Monday February 9, 2009** and 'Lolita' (the 'Satanic Verses' of it's time?) will be discussed on **Monday March 9, 2009**.

2009 Meeting dates;

Meetings take place on the Second Monday of the Month, from 6.30 PM to 8 PM at the Earlwood Public Library, Corner of Homer and William Streets.

February 9, March 9, April 13, May 11, June 8, July 6, August 10, September 14, October 12, November 9 and December 7

Conclusion - I will probably make an effort to attend the February and March meetings, and then make a book-by-book, month-by-month decision on attending future meetings.

Garry's Notes from the Men only Book Group meeting held at Campsie Library, 6.30 to 7.45 pm on Wednesday December 10, 2008

The majority of regulars at Book discussion meetings (with the exception of SF and Crime / Detective groups?) are women. The Canterbury Library system has several different book meetings, several general groups at branch libraries and Chinese and Arabic language groups as well as a teenagers group. This meeting is an attempt to redress the under representation of men at these meetings.

So, What do You read?

Chris - participates in both the Earlwood and Campsie Branch library book reader's meetings, enjoys the challenge to diversify by having to read other's book choices and recommendations. Otherwise tends to read Non-Fiction more frequently than Fiction.

Garry - I resisted the urge to give the 'Why SF is great' speech, instead described some of the non-SF reading I do. Did mention some of the Genre and Single Author meetings I have attended.

Ken - Reads for pleasure AND to be informed. Makes a conscious attempt to read Fiction and then some Non-Fiction. Has followed up an interest sparked by Fiction to read up on the History of the story's setting.

Thomas - participates in the Lakemba group, it's only regular male member? Reads Historical and Crime Fiction and an appetite for the eclectic in search of new experiences to read about. Has had good and bad experiences following other people's advice / choices for book group reading.

Steve - A slow but constant reader, frequently reads magazines about Music and Movies to keep informed. No particular favourite types of Fiction, but occasionally reads some Science Fiction and Fantasy and even Graphic novels (AKA high concept Comic Books).

Paul - Reads a lot of Newspapers and magazines to be informed. Particularly Science Magazines and The Rationalist. Also reads books that include History and Theology themes. As for Fiction, more keen on some of the newer European Novelists than the 'popular' US and UK Best Sellers.

The Group's Future?

- Following this exchange of reading habits there was some general discussion of the future format / purpose of future meetings of this group. Several different formats were discussed - Book of the month random Genre - Book of the month 'Mens' Interest Genres - Pick a theme and choose your own book to read and report on - Bring and talk about whatever you are reading. The clear implication is that for a Men's book group to prosper at Campsie library some point there has to be a clear and accurate statement about what the group does, as unless the on the night discussions meets notice on the door expectations people will fail to return for a second meeting.

- A view was expressed that after group discussion of an initially disliked book the reluctant reader might be lead to reassess their opinions on the book. **Ben Elton's** WW1 Historical / Biographical book 'First Casualty', about the experiences of both sets of grandparents, English and German was cited.

- It was suggested (by me) that the library should survey all male borrowers on 'What do you read?' and 'What books / reading matters would you like to discuss?' as well as asking what evenings or weekend times would you be available for a book chat.

- The question of Numbers came up, with six men present this group could be better with some additional participants, to insure against 'bad nights' where with a few people away or unprepared four or so people present at a meeting it could become just a conversation between two and an 'outsider'. Doubling to Twelve (easily possible) would probably require a formalisation of the meeting's structure. Better at that point to have two smaller meetings on different dates with some membership overlap, i. e. Monthly for most people and in effect fortnightly for the 'dead keen' who decide to attend both meetings? A suggested title for the group that amused Library staff rather than being whole heartedly endorsed was that the group could be called '**The Campsie Mens Reading Group and Circle of Wisdom**', the MRG&CW (Mister G and See Double You?), coz Men Who Read clearly do have loads of spare Wisdom to share.

Future Meetings

Resolved that for the immediate future the meeting will take place on the THIRD Wednesday each month and start at 6.30 pm. For the next two meetings (January 21 and February 18, 2009) the business of the meeting will be a 'Bring and discuss a book you have read recently' and the theme / format of subsequent meetings will evolve, depending on who shows up / what they want to read.

The Science Fiction Question

Of this group of six men, one was strongly SF Negative, one (me!) strongly SF positive and three admitted to reading SF&F sometimes / occasionally but not to a level of fannish intensity. About what I would expect. I challenged the SF negative person to write down their definition / description of the 'Science Fiction and Fantasy' that he could not stand, as it would be interesting to know if he is in fact reacting against Quest Fantasy or Sci-Fi rather than 'real' Science Fiction.

and writing I'd better keep a close eye on outbreaks of the same that occur close to home, so when I say that there was an evening 'Better than Chocolate' book launch event taking place at the local library (and on the way home from Work) I psychically booked myself a seat.

Bankstown line trains being what they are and all that I think I arrived unfashionably late for this, a speaker seemed to be midway through a talk so I guess I missed the big introduction and part of the first (or second?) speaker, so my first reaction was to note the meeting particulars as I had missed the start / point of the speaker's reading.

The meeting was conducted in a glassed in seminar / meeting room at Campsie public library, two dividable rooms made into one for the purposes of this meeting, 18 by 28 foot? This room is used by the library as the venue for several types of monthly 'Book Club' or reader's meetings during the month; all ages encouraged to read etc, a practice to be praised! Definitely worth keeping this / these rooms in mind for future Futurian / Freecon type events?

Who was there?

Four out of the 12 contributors to this 'New Writing' Anthology were present to read and an Audience of 7 people attended including library staff. That was 3 male and 4 female, not too encouraging I would have thought? The twelve met at a NSW Writers Centre 'How to Write' course or monthly meeting. The current work they are pushing 'Better than Chocolate', a writer's nirvana like reaction to finally getting published? The book is I believe a fundraiser, with proceeds going to an overseas charity that funding Overseas Education projects, possibly this charity is called 'Room to Read'. In any case they have sold enough copies of 'Better than Chocolate' at this point to have covered printing costs, so I guess that is some sort of a success / value judgement on the writing?

The Stories?

- One Writer mentioned 'Poetry from Life', and I think she was saying that Writing was her refuge / response to a violent marriage / home life, sort of writing out the demons of her past?

- One writer mostly spoke of her writer's career trajectory, Stand up comedy via corporate story telling? (Not sure what these notes mean by that!)

One story was called, 'Man Soup' and was an attempt at a WW1 battlefield Ghost story; its ending seemed self evident. I think that this was about the closest to Spec. Fiction in their book.

- The fourth story was about 'Going Respectable', no conscious memory.

At one point I asked - 'Have you considered writing Science Fiction?' and the result was nearly a squeal of enthusiasm along the lines 'why don't we all write a SF&F story for our next Anthology' which I thought was a trifle naïve?

At some point the meeting collapsed into a would-be writer's self help / support seminar with testimony being exchanged - Welcome to would-be writer's self absorbing love-in!

Incidental disclosures

- Library staff revealed that **Stephanie Meyer's** 'Supernatural Romance', AKA Vampire stories, first gained their foothold in the Canterbury library system (a Whitby landfall moment?) after requests were received from some Islamic schoolgirls. These books were being read, discussed and recommended by word of mouth by among these Islamic schoolgirls well before the self-fuelling publicity 'bandwagon' that is the **Stephanie Meyer** phenomenon came to Australia. Possibly they were informed by email contact with their US cousins? Due to an 'open mike' incident at a recent Australian Speculative Fiction event, it is understood that industry insiders refer to **Stephanie Meyer** type stories, teenage girl in love with 'perfect gentleman' and caring Vampire as 'Vampire Slut Fiction'.

- In the UK there are competitive rankings of book groups. One all Male Manchester (The Rats?) group is ranked in the top five!

Garry's Observations, Conclusions and (egregious?) Generalisations

- **Men read for 'Information'**, both technical information on the Who, What and When of Art, History, Music, and Technology but to gain some insight into the 'how it all works' of other Societies or situations that are alien to the (Male) reader. Women read for escape into a comfortable, familiar and repeatable universe and are more into 'how it feels'? i.e. Romance Novels and Quest Fantasy where the character 'grows' as a result of the trials and tribulations / comes to a deeper understanding of oneself?

2009 Meeting dates,

THIRD WEDNESDAY 6.30 PM at
Campsie Public Library

January 21, February 18, March 18, April 15,
May 20, June 17, July 15, August 19, Sept. 16,
October 21, November 18, December 16

Garry's Notes from the 'Better than Chocolate' Book launch event held at Campsie Library on November 11, 2008

Most of the sentences in this account end with a question mark. Frankly I was a bit puzzled and uncertain about what this meeting was 'worth' and what it was about. Superficially it was to sell copies of a book that has been in print for some time. My reason for considering showing up to this was that if I'm going to be serious about Books

Other tid bits noted

Mention was made of a desire to move from short story to full length Novel status writing (what has higher status, two good unpublished short stories or a rank and completely unpublishable 'true to life' and literary Novel?).

Jane Austen and Buffy fan events were mentioned, as was the sage presence of Garth Nix at SF&F conventions.

Sensible advice on the importance of introductory letters were mentioned, this after all is the part of your manuscript submission that is most likely to be fully read by the publisher / agent! Unless it sells and describes the product well what hope is there of getting published?

How we write was broadly discussed by the four writers present, some start with a 'Morning Glory' story idea, some intriguing story idea half remembered from a dream, or some interesting and really memorable line of text that nearly spontaneously come into being as a nucleating point for a sentence and then a story.

Thomas Hardy's Cabbages were mentioned (but not their Irish Potato famine context!)

Other thoughts included stories from teenagers discussions overheard on busses and the

Anthropological approach (observation of the subject) Vs applying imagination and culling the ideas that just do not work?

Conclusion - I've had worse times at bigger Capital 'L' Literary events in the past. This evening was an interesting encounter, but I think I can live better without being sucked into the 'Would-be Writer' vortex of courses and study groups that leads down the rabbit burrow into a wainscoting mirror universe? I do not think I would even want to go out with a woman who 'Wants to be a Writer' not enough attention left for me? Too self absorbed within the 'I want to be a Writer' sub culture (or Fandom?) Going out with a Writer would be OK though, they seem a bit more focussed on observing the world with the expectation of finding some experience 'from life' to fictionalise.

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The Men's Book Discussion group meeting held at Campsie Library on Wednesday January 21, 2009

Slightly bothered by lack of in-library communication. On enquiring about where the meeting was to be held I was told by desk staff 'probably starts again next month', in spite of my pointing out the flyer on display, featuring the visage of Clint Eastwood, advertising 'January 21, 2009'. Issue resolved and we were four present (one apology), most of the men who agreed to meet again from last year.

What we talked about - Much talk about wisdom passed on by **Tim Martin**, the proprietor of the **Infinitas SF&F bookshop**. Tim is something of an authority on 'what men read' (and what women read if they buy books from his shop) as purchases and book preferences are tracked so he can better offer people more books that are congruent to their tastes. Tim also runs a 'Blokey Stuff' shop at the same location.

There was discussion of famous 'phenomena' books, i.e. such as **J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter** series Vs **J. R. R.**

Tolkien's The Lord Of the Rings. Materially different sorts of book, but the book /s that everyone was reading at one time, how much a self-feeding publicity phenomena and how much a fresh and new read? The books by **Philip Pullman**, a writer of openly Atheistic stories, were mentioned as an example of 'publicity by notoriety'. 'Nearly Banned' in the US, for some people reading these books might be an act of defiance above and beyond their literary merit?

Birds Without Wings, a sequel of sorts to **Captain Correlli's Mandolin** was discussed at great length, it explores aspects of life (and mythology) on a Greek Cyclades Island.

The Road, by **Cormack McCarthy** was discussed. A rather padded book, large type and few short lines on each page to make it seem more of a novel? It is a post apocalypse road trip by a father and son. Much of the book is a dialogue between Father and son, the son's voice serving as a conscience, or, if you prefer, a travelogue of parables? The prevailing 'colour' of this book is Gray, gray people and gray landscapes prevail. By the same Author the book (and Movie) '**No country for Old Men**'. **The Road** has been lauded as 'Brilliant' (by people who DO NOT read SF) and panned as 'nothing new, lots of plot holes' by some SF readers. Post apocalypse SF has been around since the 1950s, Fritz Leiber's '**A Canticle for Leibowicz**' or '**Earth Abides**' could be recommended for those in search of perspective.

A book suggested for reading ahead of next month's (third Wednesday) meeting, February is '**Iron Masters; Book three of the Amtrak Wars series**, by (UK writer) **Patrick Tilley**. (this failed to eventuate) G Dalrymple © Feb 2009

Garry's Notes from the (mixed) Book discussion Group at Campsie Library, 6.30 pm to 7.45 pm on Wednesday January 28, 2009. Book discussed: '**Lolita**' by **Vladimir Nabokov**.

Initially there were 13 people were present, but one woman left very shortly after the meeting started, stating that she 'Didn't / Couldn't read Lolita, just dropped by to exchange books' and to apologise. So it was 4 M and 8 F, with the organiser / meeting leader being one of the 'M's. Procedural differences were very shortly evident between the 'Male' and 'Female' approaches to discussing a topic. Your turn / my turn to talk rules were infrequently observed and at times there were two side conversations taking place at the same time as the 'main' discussion. Another unstated difference was that the women were completely untroubled by the prospect of bringing in other reading / life experiences into the discussion of the book in question, to a degree that an all male group would probably object to?

Discussion of the book

I handed out my two page review of the half of Lolita that I had been able to force myself to read. I was pleased to see that several of the points that I raise in it were seconded by other people at this meeting. I was very surprised to learn that after I stopped reading the mood of the book changes greatly with a road trip across America, close observation of American mores, Murders and the

appearance of an even darker Anti-hero than Humbert Humbert! The organiser admitted that part of the reason for the 'brave' choice of this book was that it would provoke discussion, the other was that as a re-issued Orange cover Penguin Classic it was available for under ten dollars!

A greater proportion of the people present than usual admitted that they 'didn't read the book', some were very dismissive of the book (or the parts they had read). Discussion turned to the 'sin' in desiring or participating in sex with underage of consent partners, equality of age Vs age differences, thinking about it Vs participating in it etc. The movie *Austen Powers* was mentioned re an entry on Austin's 'before I die' wish list (Japanese *Lolita* anime costumed twins!). *Lolita* was another book where the main character is obsessive and fails to connect to real people (*Confederacy of Dunces* cited), conversely, what we read in the book is exclusively Humbert Humbert's point of view. The book is about obsession rather than Love or Sex. There is an intention to play around with a cultural Taboo, also the writer plays with language to the point of distraction to several people at the meeting, English words used needed recourse to a dictionary to ascertain if they were 'dirty' or not, and flights into French for no other reason than to show off?

A diversion (one of many) from talking about the book was the scandal de jure, knee jerk banning from display of a photo of two toddlers, lead to discussion that a 'Serious' Australian writer is planning a *Lolita* like book, school boy seduces female Teacher, specifically to try to re-introduce some objectivity to the 'debate' about child sexuality.

Conclusion — *Lolita* is a book by a skilled Writer in a 'show off' mood? A Book like *Lolita* probably could not be written and published at this time, people are too sensitised to 'child sexualisation issues', and too estranged from the assumed vocabulary of Classical Literature to be amused by the Literary wordplay that Nabakov employs, although the barn door would be entirely open to a sequel '*Lolita's Story*'; in her own words', and appearances by the Author on Oprah etc. although this would entirely miss the point of the original?

Next Month's meeting takes place at Campsie Library, Amy Street Campsie on Wednesday 25 February, 2009. The book to be discussed is 'Breath' by (West Aust. writer) Tim Winton. © GPD 29 January 2009

Garry's Book Review of 'Lolita'
due for, Monday Dec. 8, 2008, and the Earlwood Library Book Club, re-cycled for the Campsie library meeting of January 28, 2009.

A curious story indeed!

I got my copy (with authentic 1960s cigarette burn holes on alternate pages, groovy man!) from the Library at the **Sydney Mechanics School of Arts**.

The edition I read was provided with a chapter length section at the back of International opinions and reactions

to this book, basically labouring away on the theme of 'Why this isn't a 'Dirty Book', it's a Classic', and two prefaces / author's introductions on much the same theme. So far I've read up to about page 50, H. H. has just installed him self in *Lolita's* household and he is joyously anticipating

Many years ago I saw or bought a copy of *Lolita* in Russian or French. My impression of the book was that it seemed to be laid out as if it were a book of poems, rather than usual length chapters. So it was also in this edition. It is a curious arrangement, is each chapter intended as a 'love poem' to the sub-teenage muse? I've only ever seen a similar short chapter treatment in some books by **Kurt Vonnegut** and I do detect an element of Vonnegutian mundane absurdity running through Humbert Humbert's account of his life and it's ending, as just in a Vonnegut story you are told the nearly incomprehensible (or distasteful in this story?) end at the beginning and it is the art of the storyteller to convey you through the unfolding story to the point when that end is explained.

As a reader of mostly idea based fiction (SF and Historical) I'm more interested in the 'destination' of a story rather than the descriptive travelogue of things encountered along the way. Consequently I can sort of see what they are getting at in claiming *Lolita* to be a 'Literary Classic'. There is lots of detailed (and insightful?) description of Humbert Humbert's life and how he came to be the Psuedopaedophile that he claims to be. I endured reading a great deal of similar narrative when I read '*Rebecca*' (to aid my niece's school project), oodles of descriptive bumph while the resolution of the story was in clear sight from about the middle of the first chapter?

It would be interesting to stage a confrontation between **Charles Dodgeson** (an obsessive photographer of naked pubescent girls) and Humbert Humbert, superficially they have a common interest, but I suspect they would actually have less than nothing in common and would infact be mutually appalled at each other's application or lack of application to the subject in question. What would Lewis Carol and Humbert Humbert think of the current ubiquity of the images of the sexualized child faced models?

So is H. H. as described in *Lolita* a 'real' or convincing paedophile? I think not. There is far too much life history and historical justification quoted Before *Lolita* is in fact encountered for a first time. A 'sincere' paedophile would have got down to 'business' first and then the justifications would come out later. We do get a lot of Humbert Humbert's motherless childhood and inconclusive sexual awakening with a similar aged girl, but so what, everyone has an age of sexual awakening, paedophilia is a Sexual Orientation, a failure to 'move with the times' in growing up. Humbert Humbert describes his participation in his fascination as in fact an off and on thing, something that he can desist from, put to one side for a while and take up years later. This rings false, 'Real' Paedophiles live and work hard at pursuing their 'interest', managing career and family situations specifically to get into controlling relationships with children. Humbert Humbert does not.

What I think is going on is what the Author suggests in one of the prefaces, he is having a lend of us, in the manner of a European sophisticate among barbarous English speakers. Europeans of a cultured milieu would get the joke, his Lolita fascination could just as easily been for a fat and Fortyish figure, but an underage Lolita would exercise the outrage of the uptight Anglo Saxons? Humbert Humbert is intended as an intentionally absurd figure, viz the matter of his first wife and her separation from him and her eventual fate as described, Two mental breakdowns (before and after his High Arctic high farce expedition) and it is the absurdity of 'love' being depicted, by having a character pursuing a ludicrous relationship. I.e. if Humbert Humbert's relationship with Lolita did continue without interference, how long could it in fact last before 'Lo' had transitioned into the sort of woman, her mother say, that he found so unappealing. I think that Humbert Humbert's life is intended as a demonstration of an infatuation with a fleeting will o the wisp identity.

Verdict – OK I suppose, boring enough to be a 'Literary Classic'. A bit laboured in getting to its point and I think that the original (discarded) 30 page treatment might have been more to the point? Although I knew that the Movie version was different I wasn't aware of how different it would be from the book version, a small surprise though! © GPD Dec 2008.

Lolita Reviewed, Part two; After Page 45 – Manipulation and consideration?

No I did not get to finish this book. I stuck it out to about halfway through before saying – Enough! I just could not sustain the interest. I can read most non-SF books where;

A. the Main Character is sufficiently endearing or B. the world and the outcome of the story inspires curiosity about how it all works our in the end.

I found Humbert Humbert to be beyond interest and as we are told earlier on in the book that the story ends with a court case building that is ultimately derailed by a suicide, not much suspense there! Now if the matter had proceeded to a court case, with cross examination etc. that might have been an interesting exercise to follow up on.

Any good points? Never mind the tailoring, examine the fabric?

I think Lolita does score some points in it's depiction of a stage in the development of a child, the playfulness and desire for conversation with an Adult (Any Adult who can't get out of the way fast enough) I used to encounter this most weeks when I was selling Astronomy Posters, kids of a certain age just want an adult to talk to, any stranger would do, and they are prepared to tell you just about anything about their lives etc. with very little prompting. This of course has absolutely Nothing to do with 'Love' or sexuality. They just have a hunger to communicate that their parents are too busy to see. This is the kernel on which the confabulation of Lolita is built, 'Art' of a sort I guess, but not a picture I'd care to cross the street to examine more closely. I think, in the end that this book offers a disservice to those who are trying to get the very serious issue of paedophilia dealt with, by clouding the issues. Whatever Humbert Humbert is he is not your

typical paedophile, he is just too lacking in action compared to 'real' paedophiles I have read about, so as an 'insight' into that issue this book is completely useless.

As a piece of 'Art', evidently a literate exercise attempting to justify the unjustifiable it probably deserves a 'pass' mark only, as who these days can be entirely sympathetic with this adventure as seen from the worldview of an 'old school' Upper middle class European Aesthete? I think the Lolita story was dated even when it first came out, with a nineteenth century main character and his self justifications some how hanging on in the mid 20th century? More correctly this book should be called 'Humbert Humbert' but ultimately it is a judgement on our society that we would rather pick up a book to read about an on the cusp of woman hood child rather than a book that explains a middle aged man's inner motivations? © GPD January 2009

Garry's Notes in advance of the SMSA Crime / Detective Book Reader's Group meeting on Saturday January 31, 2009 Topic: Crime stories involving Hobbies and Collectors

My Observations on Why? – I feel that there may be many reasons why books about Crimes involving Hobbies and Collectors could come to be written. Some reasons might be;

1. Firstly, I expect that all successful books are written about characters that readers can comprehend and readers of any sort are by definition and interest hobbyists and collectors?
2. H & C folk are a people slightly removed from the mainstream of general experience, hence available to be 'quirky' perpetrators, victims or investigators to engage the reader?
3. There is also the possibility of the gradual uncovering of the true picture of the crime as specialized knowledge drawn on by the investigator makes the true facts of the case / motivations of the perpetrator gradually emerged.
4. H & C folk might be more prone to being obsessively driven people?
5. H & C allows much scope for initially obscure motivations for crime

This topic allows me to re-introduce my review of 'Belladonna', involving the investigation of a murder and attempt at extortion of **Lewis Carol / Charles Dodgeson**. The circumstances driving the crime being the consequences of Lewis Carol / Charles Dodgeson's hobby of Photography and his collection of images of young women, and the resulting opportunities for serious blackmail.

As an interest in **Science Fiction** can be a hobby then two examples of SF fandom relevant Crime novels come to mind, both by **Sharyn McCrumb**, 'Bimbos of the Death Sun' (which I have not read) about a Murder at a SF convention, where just about every convention attendee / SF enthusiast had a motive to do the deed. In 'Zombies of the Gene Pool' the draining of a dam lead to the re-emergence of a residence where 'the old gang' had buried a time capsule, reputed to contain the now priceless 'lost'

SF story of a now deceased SF writer. The now Middle aged 'old gang', who were once a SF fannish community / Slan shack household re-gathers for the treasure search and mysterious events occur. I also recall a fire bombing murder mystery set at a big SF convention in Hong Kong, where the number of movie 'Special Effects' capable people and the wearing of SF Character costumes complicated the detective's task.

Astronomy – I have read of a story (title unknown but possibly by **Isaac Asimov**) where a hobby of Astronomy was put to murderous use. In it a cuckolded amateur Astronomer kills his unfaithful wife and suitor by use of an authentic 'death ray'. He ran a powerful light through his big observatory mounted telescope, blinding the driver as he/she negotiated twisty mountain roads!

A thought for the meeting to consider for the future - On any given Saturday set for a meeting of this group some SMSA members who could / should be interested in attending will not be able to attend, may not care for the particular meeting's topic or might just plain forget to show up. Might it be a worth considering some time during 2009 to pick say the best four topics of recent meetings and make a full Saturday of it, re-discuss topic 1 starting 10 am, topic 2 starting 11 am, break for lunch, topic 3 starting 1 pm, topic 4 starting 2 pm and finishing up at 3.30 pm.

Some SMSA members / library users might make the additional effort to come in for the day specifically to take part in a discussion of topic 1 and 3 and then decide to better future, a University level lecturer could be found to talk on the topic as well?

My experience with doing a similar thing with the Sydney Futurians (a SF discussion group) was that 'regulars' turned up to re-discuss a topic, as well as past members for whom the usual meeting time / date had become inconvenient. In effect double the turnout to usual monthly meetings!
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Garry's Notes from the Book group meeting held at the Earlwood Public Library on Monday February 9, 2009. Book of the month / discussion topic: George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four.

Present were - Six people

Observations;

- Style of writing is a bit dated, long excursions that read like a political manifesto, rather than a modern action novel.
- First half of the book, before Winston's capture was enjoyed.
- Noticed the multiple early forebodings of Doom by Winston, builds a mood of expectation.
- Surprise at the early and unconditional trust of O'Brien by Winston, although Julia stated misgivings.
- The telescreens, surprise at the implications, with telescreens 'everywhere' how many people can big Brother afford for active constant monitoring, very labour intensive oppression and supervision? Would have to be a very large number of people? Unjustified extension of one

way BBC broadcasting but with Stalinistic police violence required to enforce it?

- The Language that George Orwell uses - directness and bleakness in descriptions, Newspeak without the restricted vocabulary?

- Overconfidence in the power of puffery, Big Brother's pronouncements owing much to 1920s and 1930s Advertising. Do we believe everything that the man in the box says, Big Brother has been marketing himself for 30 plus years by 1984.

- Over Emphasis on the Party, inner and Outer. They are only 15% of the population, are they really watching and controlling the whole of the population or is Big Brother mostly a party members only pre-occupation and hardly noticed by the other 85%? Especially when you consider the question that Winston struggles with while visiting the Prole pub, 'What is Truth / History?', Subjectivity Vs After the event 'Objectivity' determined by an after the events History writing elite? Compare and contrast George Bush's 'War on Terror', was it really a War, was it really against 'Terror'?

- Julia was a better player of the game, reader of the times than Winston, what would her story have read like?

- The troubling dimension of 'Resistance'. Winston and Julia said that they were quite prepared to commit pointless and vicious acts against innocent third parties in offering resistance to Big Brother. After this admission why would we be surprised at Winston's betrayal of Julia in room 101?

- Winston and Julia's sex life under Big Brother? Furtiveness and secrecy based on the realities of a Gay British man in the 1920s and 1930s (Oxford Colleges?), possible but not allowed to be open about it.

- The matter of the ambiguity of attitude towards the Proles, loved by Winston, seen as the only hope for a better future, but dismissed by the Big Brother system, which is the authentic voice of George Orwell.

Other matters discussed - The Bush fire situation, enforced fire-proof building codes Vs re-building in the same fire prone style 'as soon as possible'.

ISBN 0-330-02657-7 **This Perfect Day**, by **Ira Levin US, 285 pages, © 1969** Read Dec. 18 to 22, 2008

A book by an Author who has avoided identification as being a 'Science Fiction Writer' This story was written after 1984 and Rosemary's Baby, but before the Stepford Husbands and Logan's Run? After Colossus the World wide World Controlling Computer that brought peace through unity with it's behind the Iron Curtain rival? A story about the life of a man who was raised in a long standing World wide society that is politically unified, efficient, computer run and without conflict, where the population is counselled and medicated to ensure conformity to this ideal. It is as if 1984's three global powers sunk their differences, unified and brought about their highest stated ideals? Except that everyone is Id braceleted, medicated and dies at 62 years of age. Free thought etc. is even less possible than in Winston Smith's day.

The storyline of this book is a lot more ambitious than in 1984. In 1984, Winston Smith resists, is 'corrected', comes to love Big Brother - Happy ending. In this book, the main character has a 'counter revolutionary' grandfather, grows up to resist, is caught and corrected,

escapes the system, strikes out at the system, discovers it's inner corrupt core and eventually manages to bring it down. Less happy ending as the world will have to learn how to live without it's governing institutions. The 'Horror' of the system of control in 'This Perfect Day' is that it does not need violence, constant War or executions to maintain. It is all done with well intentioned social conditioning and mood changing medication, something you could easily imagine occurring with the best of intentions instead of the malign intent of 1984? If Winston Smith had succeeded in bringing down Big Brother and ending the War with Eurasia and East Asia, you could imagine 'This Perfect Day' coming about, to prevent the return of Big Brother?

Themes – Conformity – Social order by Medication – World Government / Political System – Story of the life of a rebel against the System – Insurrection within a Society – Worldwide Computer – an Ordered World

ISBN -13:978-0-374-11634-7 Breath, by Tim Winton Aust / WA, 218 pages, © 2008, Aust Lit. - Dewey Decimal 823'.914, read March 4 to 9, 2009

- A book read (under some sufferance?) for the Men's Campsie book reading group.

- A middle aged Ambulance officer's looking back on his own coming of age / discovering of self identity in small town / seaside Australia story. Done better by **Johnston** in 'My Brother Jack' or **Randolph Stowe's** (also set in WA) 'Merry go round in the Sea', both seemingly deeper and more detailed treatments than the streamlined version here, bit part parents, one mate, one older mentor figure etc.

- A very short and blank paper padded 'Novel', well spaced type, gaps between paragraphs just to bulk up an otherwise slender volume.

- Pre-eminent Novelist of his generation! Or so the back cover of the book announces. Is this really so? Is the term 'Pre-eminent Novelist' really industry code for frequently reviewed but not exactly a Best Selling Author?

- The Central 'idea' or theme which is mentioned occasionally through the book is Breath (and it's interruption), as a standing in as a metaphor for life, this could have been explored adequately in a detailed enough short story, but for the commercial imperatives acting on an Australian celebrity 'name' author?

- Best mate as expendable alter ego, to be more fatally obsessed with 'going further'.

- Also spotted early was that the Mentor / Guru's ego needed his acolytes more than his disciples needed his guidance, verging on child molesting.

- A sequence of three escalating challenging / life threatening Surf adventures.

- Sex with the Mentor's wife, after the Mentor has left town with the Main Character's best mate / alter ego, but only after he has performed solo his own death defying surf challenge, a quest fulfilled?. She has much the same description as the prostitute observed having sex with best mate's father, pseudo Oedipus complex?

This 'Free Sex' (underage male participant) with an older woman, without the possibility of love and Eva's autoerotic asphyxiation routine (as you see inferred in the only Ambulance call out fully described) ruin the main character for life. Nice cop out!

- Association with the Mentor figure similarly reads his best mate / alter ego onto the path of self destruction! Do we detect a theme here?

- Free Sex on tap is withdrawn when Eva gets up the duff, allowing for the author to unload his take on pregnancy aesthetics, possibly another of the Author's little quirks safely described in this Literature as art not perversion?

Conclusion: If this is in fact 'Great Australian Literature' then the blood must be running a bit thin at the moment. I get the feeling that the final few pages and the first few pages were after the event add ons to make an unsaleable Surf story Novella into a saleable Novel. It was a mildly interesting 'Surfin' story, but Jonathan Livingston Seagull was much better as a Salt Water Self discovery story?

In reading SF I have read many much better 'Challenging the powers of the Universe' stories, AKA Space Surfer stories (**Larry Niven**), 'Coming of Age/ Gaining of Self wisdom' and exploration of 'other' sexual interests (**Robert Heinlein**). All this and a whole Universe of other possibilities, only in SF! © GPD March 2009

ISBN 1-86291-605-5, Monster Blood Tattoo, Book 1; the Foundling, by **David M. Cornish Aust**, 433 pages, © 2006 Read Jan 22 to Jan 27, 2009

Really something of a surprise! This is a book that was given to me by the Author (and Illustrator) who took part in the 2008 Freecon. (David was in fact the only writer to have 'Groupies' show up to the Freecon!) Science Fiction is what I read by preference but this book was a surprise and delight. It has copious drawings of characters and detailed maps, a real plus in following the story.

The Story itself is something like Oliver Twist or the adventures of Huckleberry Finn in that under the pretext of a journey, The Foundling's path from Orphanage to first job appointment, we get to be introduced to the characters and set up of the Society of the book.

The Society is vaguely Dickensian and Medieval but with bio-machines rather than steam engines driving River and Ocean going ships and a conflict / balance between 'Everymen' and 'Monsters' on land and sea rather than feuding kingdoms.

As the Main character 'Rossamund', a boy with a girl's name, is a teenager / young Adult I presume that this is a 'Young Adult' book but in reading it I did not encounter any of the usual cut down / dumbed down / don't make much sense characters that seem to plague 'Fiction for Children', characters that say something but you can't understand how they would know that fact, or why they would be motivated to reveal it to the main character. It is also a novel and original world, it is not a 'Rightful Princess, Magic amulet and Dragon' type Fantasy.

The story, or rather the first instalment of a series of books ends rather anti-climactically with Rossamunde awaiting the dawn of his first day as a Lamplighter with several cliff hanger issues revealed by farewells and a letter from friends. I was slightly disappointed at this, but breaking a story into stages is the commercial reality of Fantasy publishing these days.

The edition I read presented the story exceptionally well. Major characters encountered in the story are represented by the Writer's own Drawings, and the maps are better realised than in my edition of LOTR.

The final third of the volume is a glossary of terms used in the book (series) and was interesting enough to read beyond the necessity of having to identify strange words (archaicisms?) used by the Author.

I think this book / series is well worth getting with the intention of reading a chapter a night to small children ahead of bedtime, with slightly older children able to independently explore the world of the book through the Glossary and appendices as the book / series seems to have a depth about it that should be inviting for children to explore.

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Garry's Notes from the Sydney City Skywatcher's meeting, Monday February 2, 2009, Sydney Observatory

Guest Speaker: Richard Jaworski, ASNSW, Topic: The Leviathan of Parsonstown, the 183 cm reflecting Telescope of the 3rd Earl of Rosse

Who was there; About 20 people, including several new people I had not met at previous Sydney City Skywatchers meetings, indicating that the Skywatchers have prospered in my absence?

Members Observations

I arrived too late to hear **Monty Leventhal's** Sunspot observations and I arrived part way through **Harry Roberts** observations of some interesting Lunar Craters with 'Australian' connections Lunar craters, those named after First Fleet Surveyor and Astronomer, **Marines Lt. William Dawes** and his son who was a more illustrious professional Astronomer. **William Dawes** had been instructed by **Nevil Maskelyne** Astronomer Royal to function as Australia's first commissioned Astronomer. Incidentally, he also served three terms as Sierra Leone's Governor, Sydney's sister colony in Africa.

Alan Plummer discussed his variable star observations, particularly a flaring variable whose outburst of increased brightness when graphed revealed a curious sawtooth / stepped pattern, decreasing times between outbursts etc. Referring this anomaly to a world expert on the mechanics of Variable Stars, a magnetic cycle was diagnosed. I.e. Two mass exchanging Stars were involved, the progressive expansion in diameter of one binary causing the period between flarings to be shorter as the matter had less distance to cover between the two stars! **The Binary Stars section of the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand** has returned to activity, with reduced responsibilities due to a difficulty in finding volunteers and overshadowed by the extraordinary activity / competency of

Frank Bateson. Alan has accepted a role within the newly revived 'Southern Hemisphere only' section.

Garry Dalrymple - As an observation I introduced two items, one a late news item, the discovery of a hand axe in Malaysia increases the age of 'Out of Africa' for human ancestors to 1 point something Million years, some tens of thousands of years earlier than previously discovered Caucasian artefacts. This discovery is datable by it's being discovered in geology created by a Meteor Impact! The other item was that I passed around a colour photocopy of an apparently unidentified Australian Meteor impact feature, a tree ringed and water filled 'Billabong - South Australia'. It's dimensions and stated location do not correspond to entries on the 'official' internet list of Australian Astroblemes. It is possibly a Limestone sink hole or it's location has been miss described.

NB subsequent correspondence received from the SA Museum and the Meteorite section at the Australian Museum (Sydney) confirm that it probably isn't a South Australian feature, so it's identity and location remain unconfirmed.

On The Topic; the Leviathan (telescope) of Parsonstown

Richard Jaworski is doubly blessed by a having a career that permits frequent international travel and also an understanding wife who is prepared to accompany him on side excursions to nearby sites of Astronomical significance during these trips. In 2005 he was able to include a visit to Ireland and to visit Birr Castle, which is located in about the geographical middle of the Irish Republic, the home of the Earls of Rosse (still in residence) and the site of the recently restored Leviathan of Parsonstown, a giant reflecting Telescope, with a Six Foot mirror which was to be the world's largest telescope until 1917 (Palomar?), decades after it had fallen into disrepair and disuse.

How it all happened

Born in 1800 the Third Earl of Rosse, then Lord Oxmantown was educated by tutors and at Trinity College, graduating in 1822 with first class honours (in Mathematics?). As you do, he sat in the House of Lords and then had the good fortune to 'marry well', as his wife's money permitted him to build a series of increasingly large telescopes in the grounds of the family seat (18 inch equatorial, 36 inch Alt Azimuth and eventually the 72 inch Leviathan). Interestingly, his wife was interested in the then infant art of photography and the 2005 restoration of the Leviathan owes much to these 'family' photographs, as the design of the telescope changed greatly over it's working life, departing significantly from original plans or models. The Earl was self taught in Astronomy, before joining the Royal Astronomical Society and had to learn the art of mirror making by experiment as the best mix for a highly reflective speculum alloy was a proprietary secret. By 1826/27 he settled on a mixture of Copper: Tin in a 4:1 ratio. Amazingly, the construction of this cutting edge instrument was all done on site, using local artisans! It was also possibly the last major 'cutting edge' Telescope to be built with site determined by a private owner's convenience rather than consideration of site advantages

for observation. The great Astronomical question of this time was then whether the newly discovered Spiral Nebulae were made of Stars or Gas? But, before the third Earl could set eye to eyepiece the Irish Potato Famine intervened causing him to spend three years on famine relief work instead of Astronomy. He seems to have been a better sort of Landlord as well as a man of Science.

The instrument.

The design of the Leviathan may have been influenced great storm of 1839, which blew the 36 inch off its setting ring! The design was reminiscent of a Dobsonian, with a universal joint at the bottom of the 54 foot long tube and some degree of East-West Travel (about one hour of tracking possible) between the two piers, which resembled the walls of fortifications capable of repelling several hundred years of Vikings! Observations, exposed to the weather would have been a similarly heroic ordeal at times? The tube was built like a barrel, with wooden staves stabilised by 8 foot tube steel bands. There were two mirrors, 6 foot wide, 5 inches thick and weighing 3 tonnes. The reason for this was that one mirror was in use and the other off being re-polished, the finish on a Speculum mirror being much less lasting than aluminium or silvered glass. All up the Telescope weighed about 12 tonnes and needed a crew of eight or so assistants operating windlass and cables to drive it! A secondary mirror required counter weighting. Observation was direct to the eyepiece, there was No finder scope and for the observer to reach the eyepiece there were three galleries to climb as the telescope and eyepiece moved. All up it cost the equivalent to perhaps \$5 million in today's money to build, all for perhaps 30 good observing nights a year!

What the Leviathan could do

It was able to range from horizon to zenith but needed to wait for the time of year's sky to be presented to it. Jupiter was observed to good effect, motion and cloud details were noted. Very active observing program on Nebulae; Spiral Galaxy were clearly resolved and drawn. The design of the Leviathan did not suit it to photographic work, consigning it in time to obsolescence. By 1865 ill health forced the Earl to give up on observing, but his son continued the work in his stead, the fourth Earl also adapted the 36 inch (no longer extant) to make it more useful. After this a succession of professional Astronomers were engaged to work the Leviathan, J. L. E. Dreyer 1874 to 1878, then Otto Boedekker etc. but by 1890 it had fallen into disuse, and many of it's parts had been lost or dispersed.

Restoration and 'Afterlife'

Restoration started in 1968, having been pushed by, among others, Patrick Moore. In 1977 a museum was opened and finally the Leviathan was re-assembled and each year since there is a Whirlpool Star party as this Nebula is clearly visible, in season, through the restored instrument. A lasting consequence of the third and Fourth Earl's interest in Astronomy was that they were the Parsons of Grubb Parsons, the great telescope making company of the 19th and 20th centuries whose telescopes are a feature of Sydney Observatory and other Astronomical institutions.

Notes from the Sydney City Skywatchers meeting of Monday March 2, 2009, at Sydney Observatory, 6.30 pm to 8.15 pm

Guest Speaker Andrew Jacob, Topic: Finding the size of the Universe with SUSI, the Sydney University Stellar Interferometer

Present were: about twenty people, members, guests and a video crew, presence noted but not explained!

Member's Observations

John August (who is now a member?) – Announced a Spoken Word performance that would be taking place at the Sydney Unitarian Church. This performance will include passages from the Egyptian book of the Dead, and the speech that was written for Richard Nixon in the event that the Apollo 11 landing ended in tragedy.

Michael Chapman – As Association President he explained that the Donovan Trust had recently distributed \$2500 in the form of several grants to promote Education / Astronomy, including some to our members. Michael also described his observations of Comet Lulin (from Seaforth?) through 10 by 80 Binoculars. It was visible but not too bright.

Garry Dalrymple – Following up on the pictures of a possible 'South Australian' Astrobleme, meteor crater. Response from the South Australian Museum to the effect that they believe it unlikely to be a South Australian Feature, suggested getting in touch with the SA Astronomical Association.

Monty Leventhal – The Sun is currently Very quiet at the moment, no Sunspots observed this (February) month and only two groups seen by other observers. A few relatively minor prominences seen. Evidently Solar Cycle 24 has commenced, as the Sunspots observed were located on the other side of the Solar Equator from Cycle 23 Sunspots.

Dr Nick Lomb – Cause Celebre of the moment is Comet Lulin, observations clouded out most nights, but it has been seen from Sydney observatory. Some images of the Comet as seen from country were shown. It has been passing between Saturn and Regulus. Quite a green Comet due to the presence of Hydrogen and Diatomic Carbon in its tail. Also, the night of the Asteroid is upon us, a few hours after the meeting, at 12.40 am a 35 metre Asteroid will approach Earth, passing closer than the Moon, but further out than Geostationary Satellites, no lasting 'impact' is expected.

Alan Plummer – Discussed RASNZ ideas for variable stars that beginners could start on with a view to producing publishable results. **R Carina** was suggested, members who choose to observe this star would be adding to a light curve based on observations made 1880 to 1890 by our association's founder, **John Tebbutt**.

Harry Roberts – On this occasion no observations, as he is resting up after recent minor surgery.

Garry Dalrymple won the door prize raffle, collecting an edition of Norton's Star Atlas (a nice change!).

Finding the size of the Universe with the Sydney University Stellar Interferometer (SUSI)

I knew Andrew briefly at University by a rather uncommon but infectious nick name. This talk was to be about his Ph D. research topic, the study of three Ceiphid Variable stars in an attempt to more accurately tie down the scale of the Universe using the SUSI device. As I was sitting in the audience next to Andrew during the member's observations I was able to glance at his notes, which were presented in the manner that is usual these days, standing in front of a computer projection screen showing as a power point like screens of headings, photos, text and graphs. All very effective - if you are there to see it, however it does not easily lend itself to recording in this format that you are currently reading. Andrew's Phd. paper would be a completely different version of the same essential facts as well. So I hope you will excuse if this account seems 'chopped up', the Sense and the Science was there in the original presentation.

The Cosmic Distance Ladder – To measure Astronomical distances several different methods are used, as no single method can be used to gives reliable interstellar distances. Going from closer to further first (within the Solar System) Radar and transits of Venus, then parallax to 100 light years then trying to fit nearby stars of observed brightness onto the Hertzsprung Russell Main sequence diagram (to 10 to the 5 Light years, then Ceiphid variables in nearby Galaxies (to 10 to the 10 light years) , then Red shift and Galactic clusters. These give distances with a 1 to 10% error standard and the level of uncertainty in these estimates is of some concern, especially as there is a gap between the distances calculable with Ceiphids and Parallax methods.

How Ceiphids can be used to determine interstellar distance is this. The relationship between a Star's size and its period of variability is Very well known and consistent. To know the observed brightness and the period of it's variations in brightness for a star of a spectral

class that identifies it as a Ceiphid variable then you can then calculate how far away the Ceiphid should be and hence the distance to and the scale of the galaxy or other structure that it is embedded in.

Andrew used bells to illustrate the size / frequency relationship, small bells ring high frequency, large bells ring lower. 'Hear' a star at a particular characteristic frequency, measure its 'loudness' and you can deduce how far away it must be. A Ceiphid Variable was discovered in 1784, a second some time later to establish the Ceiphid variable rule during the 1800s. Ceiphids are Old Stable Yellow stars of about ten Solar masses with a period of 1 to 50 days. To date about 10,000 are now known to exist in our own and neighbouring Galaxies, and some have been detected at a far greater distance, in the Centaurus Cluster (of Galaxies) which are 30 Mega Parsecs away!

SUSI operates by being able to measure small variations in the light emitted by Stars, the slight Red and Blue shifting of emissions that indicate the speed that a Star's surface is expanding towards or contracting away from the observer, i. e. if a you can accurately measure if a star is expanding or contracting you can gain a very accurate estimate of it's period. Also, SUSI can measure actual apparent Diameter which should match with this Spectroscopic data. A Star's Temperature, Brightness, Angular Diameter and surface motion are now measurable to aid in understanding what that Star is doing. If you know two, you can calculate the third even though a star can only be seen as a bright point in most telescopes.

There are several alternatives to the use of Interferometry to determine interstellar distances, but most of them are specific to a single case or area of space rendering them less than useful for accurately measuring the scale of the Universe and the motions of objects within it.

Spectroscopy is good, it's estimates come from direct observations rather than fitting observations to assumption ridden models, however a Spectroscope measures light from all points on the surface of an assumed to be uniform and spherical star surface, so these figures require correction (but SUSI doesn't). There are however not many Ceiphids that are bright enough (only 10 to 20?) and as they are difficult to measure, only 10 have been measured to date

SUSI is a very large structure, but a small telescope. It just shows up on Google Earth (near Narrabri). With two 20 cm mirrors 640 metres apart up and optical, mechanical trolleys and electronic tricks to adjust the light received it is as if the two mirrors were the edges of a single 640 metre wide mirror! With SUSI light gathering has been sacrificed to maintain resolution, i. e. to be able to detect if an object is as wide as a Man standing on the Moon, as you need this sort of resolution to be able to detect at stellar distances the changes in a star's diameter that allow you to measure by how fast it is expanding or contracting.

What you see through SUSI are a display of waveforms, similar to the cross section of the brightness of an Airey disc to give an estimate of the source object's diameter at that moment, when the seeing is clear and the instrument

correctly adjusted. This allows measurement of surface movement in the vicinity of 10 km per second, likened to measuring the bobbing of the head of a giraffe on the Moon! These results are comparable with the capability of the more recently built Chilean Interferometer, but more accuracy is expected in the future.

Next month's speaker will be **Mike Selway** who will talk about **Webcam Astro imaging**.

Some Science-ish Book reviews

ISBN 0-00-255672-3 Mammoth Hunt, in search of the Giant Elephants of Nepal, by John Blashford-Snell and Rula Lenska UK, 253 pages, © 1996

A search for real surviving Mammoths, Ice age survivors, Crypto zoology in the field? A book by the noted British Explorer/Adventurer, Boys own Stuff I thought! I had been aware of claims of 'Big Hairy Elephants' reputed to be alive in the inaccessible Jungles of Thailand, so I bought this book out of curiosity. It is set in Nepal and it turned out to be was a series of accounts of journeys in and around the wild rivers, national parks and less settled parts of Nepal in search of the 'giant' elephants reported to be seen there. The chief discovery of the book was the discovery / photography of a pair of rather larger than usual male elephants. Asian Elephants are supposed to be smaller than African ones, but these were reported as 'twelve footers'. Both of the male elephants that are the stars and the justification for this book have a curious skull shape and are completely hairless. The shape of their skull is very suggestive of that of a 2 million years extinct Stegodon, the presumed ancestor of both the African and Asian species of Elephants. Survivor, Mutant, Freak, Sport or Throwback? Hard to say. A curious set of stories set up to sell to raise money for elephant preservation projects. © GPD 19Jan09

ISBN 0-7322-8060-5 Dis Information & other Wikkid Myths (Non-Fiction), by Dr Karl Kruszelnicki Aust, 249 p. © 2005

Something of an antidote or reply to the 'Believe it or not' book, but still in the same field, a book full of 'amazing factoids' culled from the internet or popular Science magazines, but this time from a skeptical perspective. The book consists of a large number of several page long chapters about a topic or issue to do with 'Weird' or usually mis-understood Science. Each of these chapters

is well illustrated with graphs and diagrams. Intentionally short on the basic Science, formulae and Mathematics so it doesn't read like a text book. It is more like a series of conversations with Dr Karl on a popular but probably mis-understood area of life or Science. The treatment of issues in easy to understand language with Footnotes and References to primary sources for the reader to follow up later mean that this book is much better as an introduction to 'Science Fictional' Sciences than some of Dr Karl's previous popular science books, which tended to focus on the phenomena of the bizarre but newsworthy. This book clears up a few areas of misunderstanding rather than serving as a scrapbook of the 'Strange but True'. This book would be a better introduction to 'Weird Science' and how Science works than many other popular Science books that I have seen, although it is a bit light on the Science behind the facts presented, but in all it is a good book to give to teenagers of all ages who are curious about the weird stuff. © GPD 19Nov08

ISBN 0-14-012464-0 The Darwin Awards II, by W. Northcutt US, 240 p.,

© 2001 As the second, follow-up treatment of material about the Darwin Awards it is likely to disappoint. Attempts are made to put some rigour into this compilation of Urban Myths, internet legends and perpetually circulating emails of the 'would you believe it' type. Each chapter includes some explanation of aspects of the 'Philosophy' of the Darwin awards and includes explanation of what is not a Darwin Award and at times de-bunks some 'winners' that have since been established as mythical. For most people the rather superficial appeal of picking up a book like this is to read more of the 'would you believe it' type stories. There are enough of these in the book to make it worth reading and usually on the next page there is some additional information about the event or similar occurrences. Overall it was a mildly entertaining read, I suspect that The Darwin Awards I would have been a fresher read. In reading it I was aware that the Snopes website probably does the debunking, researching and explaining rather better and that the strange Deaths column of each issue of the Fortean times does notably entertaining strange deaths rather better as its readers / research base is broader and as it doesn't record these occurrences only as viewed through the prism of pseudo moralistic presumption of a deserved death due to evolution challenging stupidity. No doubt as the well of human stupidity and the appetite for shaddenfreud never runs dry there will be successor editions to this book. **Conclusion** – Mildly enjoyable, but unchallenging reading. GPD © September 2008

Ripley's Believe it or Not, Australian & New Zealand Edition, by Wendy Northcutt US, 240 pages, © 2001

It is practically Fortean that I should be reviewing this book so close in space and time to the Darwin Awards II book. This book is a compilation of reported 'facts' from before the time when Urban Myths were invented and 'unbelievable but true' stories like these owed their viral like propagation to frequently dubious 'filler' articles in

newspapers. This book is more evidence that Australia 'Punches above its weight' in matters Fortean, or does it merely reflect the Frontier / Borderland public culture common to America and Australia. Mr Ripley and Charles Fort (and even the British Guinness Book of Records?) essentially deal with the same material but with different emphasis and philosophy, entertainment as opposed to enlightenment via reports on the extraordinary, 'would you believe it' type story set at a distant or quaint location, whose credibility might well melt away if subject to too close a scrutiny. The book is an interesting 'Fossil' for what it says about what people were prepared to believe and find interesting at the time, as most items refer to times well before this book's publication. For example a 'Virgin Birth' attributed to a 15 year old via a vagrant sperm encountered during a dip in a swimming pool rather than other less morally acceptable conclusions!

Each chapter of the book has an introductory foreword to 'Class' of accounts of unusual occurrences or events. This book will be added to my permanent collection, under 'Australiana' or 'Weird'.
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2009 Sydney Futurian Dates and Topics

Friday January 16, 2009, Topic: The Best and Worst of 2009, SF&F Books, Movies, TV, Comics, SF fan events

Friday February 20, 2009, Topic: Parasites and Symbionts in SF&F stories

Friday March 20, 2009, Topic: Religion and Philosophy in SF&F Stories

Friday April 17, 2009, (for Easter?) Topic: Torture, Punishment, Prisons, Imprisonment and Restraints in SF&F Stories

Friday May 17, 2009, Topic: Complexity in SF&F Stories

Friday June 19, 2009, Topic: Avian Alien Life forms (birds of a feather?)

Friday July 17, 2009, Topic: Cyber Prostitution and other intimate services only possible in SF&F Stories

Friday August 21, 2009, Topic: Fantasy Stories that are Feudal Free or otherwise break the 'Quest Fantasy' mould

Friday September 18, 2009, Topic: Politics, Money and the Economy in SF&F Stories, realistic and laughable?

Friday October 16, 2009, Topic: The aspects that a SF Story must have to take it beyond being a Mundane story

Friday November 20, 2009, Topic: A discussion of the Best and Worst Alien Life forms

Friday December 18, 2009, Topic: Future pre-occupations for SF?

How we meet these days

As of the January 16, 2009 meeting we congregated in the UTS Foyer until about 6.55 pm and then moved off to the left (from Broadway entrances) and round the corner to some chairs (past the computers) where we found a quiet area to discuss the night's topic.

The UTS is inevitably being renovated, so the location of quiet conversation spaces may have changed since January, so get there early or you may have to wander about looking for us!

My 2009 plans for Futurian / SF&F related events include;

1. A 'Launch' of the 2009 Sydney Freecon's Short Story competition by having a Literary Dinner at my place, guests to include Writers who have taken part in Freecons past Freecon members who have entered past Freecon Short Story Competitions - a Saturday March to June?
2. A 'by invitation Futurians and Friends' Worldcon time room party, this time a 'bring a plate dinner', at my place - on a Saturday in Aug / Sept. before or during the 2009 Worldcon weekend.
3. A 2009 Sydney Freecon, Date, Venue and Duration to be determined - Probably on a weekend in Late October to Late / November.

An outline to guide Chairpersons of Sydney Futurian meetings

Background – To keep Futurian discussion meetings on topic or to reach the advertised discussion topic earlier by limiting off topic deviations & digressions some sort of semi formal meeting structure is needed. I offer the following for discussion. GP Dalrymple January 2009

The intention of a Sydney Futurian Meeting is - to allow as much interaction and discussion of SF&F matters and matters likely to be of interest to SF&F readers / Viewers without the imposition of too much formality and structure. The atmosphere should be similar to that of a University common room discussion and all present should be accorded an opportunity to share what they know about recent SF&F developments as well as an opportunity to share their opinions on what is said by other meeting members.

The (loosely interpreted) format for most Sydney Futurian meeting consists of three parts;

- A. **An informal and unstructured period of chat** before the official 7 pm ish start of the meeting. This time would be an opportunity to show off any recent book / DVD

purchases?

B. A Round Robin exchange of SF&F / Science News that is thought likely to be of interest to meeting attendees. **Time allowed each person's news** - the Chairperson should allow each person 30 minutes divided by the number of people present. If people are new to the meeting they may spend their 'news' time explaining a bit about themselves, what they have read / watched recently. In the case of attendees with no news they may be asked to briefly give an ad hoc review the most recent SF&F book that they have read. At the Chairman's discretion additional 'News time' may be allocated in the case of a meeting member with a convention report or similar special news to give to the meeting.

C. A Round Robin discussion of the topic, where each person is invited in turn to add their views and experiences that they feel are relevant to the topic under discussion. **Time allowed each person's 'On Topic' contribution** - the Chairperson should allow each person 60 minutes divided by the number of people present. All other members of the meeting should feel free to (briefly) discuss any points raised after the speaker has had their turn / allotted time. These additional comments should be to the point rather than digressions (which can be entertained after everybody has had their say during this section?)

After the C section of the meeting the chairman may ask 'Any further business?' and the meeting may be adjourned and re-constituted at a bar or restaurant for those so inclined. This would be a part D (for Drinking?) part of the meeting.

Order of Speaking?

The chairperson may choose to start the discussion with the person to the Chairperson's Left (or Right), as long as this rule is applied consistently for the evening

Garry's notes and ideas ahead of the January 16, 2009 Sydney Futurian Meeting

Topic: Your '2008 Best and Worst'

Present were: *Garry Dalrymple, Diane Fox, John Fox, Kevin McKern, Rech Giulian Sterrantino,* **Apologies received** from Stephen Bingle & Brian Walls

Garry's January 2009 SF & F News

- Long time US fan **Forrest Ackerman** (active before the 1940s) is dead.
- Mostly TV Writer **Michael Crichton** (Andromeda Strain, Binary and Jurassic Park) is dead
- There is a proposal to record, edit and podcast Futurian meetings, so as to extend our vapour membership?
- Facebook entry for the Freecon / Sydney Futurians is already gaining us friends?
- If the 2009 Freecon is held at the SMSA there is unlikely to be a Sunday session; Weeknights and longer Sunday or seek additional venue options?
- Membership inquiry #1 received for the 2009 Freecon in December / January
- There is a Dr Who event on Sunday at Drummoyne

RSL, 11 am to 5 pm? See their website for more details

- 2009 is International Astronomy year, consider the possibilities
- This year's Australian Natcon is in Adelaide, given cost differentials, I might go to the NZ Natcon instead?
- The Futurian War Time Digest, Account of Australian SF fandom in 1942, by none other than 'our' Graham Stone

Science, TV & Movie News for January 2009 Science

- Cloning Maternal DNA material from Museum display hair, lots of it apparently, from two US Thylacine specimens in a museum. A completely new route to gaining DNA from a broader range of recently extinct species?
- Martian Cows or Thouts detected? Plumes of Methane detected in the Martian Atmosphere, possibly Throat farts or due to the action of microbes deep below Mars' surface?
- Space via a vibrating Ground-to-Geostationary-Orbit Space tether. I.e a grab and release clamp system to allow a mass to 'inch' up the pole a cm or so each vibration cycle.

SF TV? - What SF TV at the moment?

- The new Dr Who is known, youngest ever, he 'clocks on' as the doctor in October 2010 (after the Melbourne Worldcon!).

Movies - The Day the Earth Stood Still is now showing, a 'Retelling' for our times, Activist eco space hippies with weapons of mass obliteration (and zero cultural sensitivity?) with some additional DNA from ID4 and The War of the Worlds? (Klaatu Barada Nickto Gort, or 'To serve Man!')

Garry's 2008 Best and Worst SF&F things SF&F events

Bests - The Blacktown Sydney Writers Festival event with **David M Cornish**, **David Kowalski** and **Stuart Mayne** (Aurealis Editor) at Blacktown, 90 ish people for an hour or so, botched moderation etc, but still an impressive result. Melbourne winning the 2010 Worldcon vote, still to be determined if this will be 'Their' Australian Worldcon or whether people beyond the bid group will have much involvement? This Year's Freecon, two days, 70 people, 10 ish writers, and a feeling of community etc. On balance I'd give it to Saturday at the Freecon as a longer and more sustained effort!

Worsts - The more dismal than usual showing of SF&F on offer at the 2008 Sydney and NSW Writers Festivals, with the exception of the Emily Rodda (school age Fantasy) appearances, easily more SF&F at the Freecon than at the publicly funded Festivals, and all in one spot!

SF&F TV

Bests - Dr Who and then well, not much else I guess. I did see Aeon Flux on TV and found it rather better than I expected, rather more Science Fictional than the original?

Worsts - For me 'Heroes', the 'Now everyone that was good is now evil and everyone evil is now good' premise of the current series was a Shark jumping moment for me, just couldn't be bothered. 'Fringe' probably deserves a mention as well, an X-Files / CSI hybrid without much of the 'Why?' It does feature the return of the universally competent Mad Scientist, a guy who literally knows how to do everything necessary for the furtherance of not entirely rational 'Scientific' detective work!

SF&F Movies

I saw no SF&F movies during 2008. I really wasn't aware of any 'real' Science Fiction movies out during 2008, but by other people's word of mouth recommendations, Best - 'Iron Man', as it did have some Science Fictional depth (and Irony?) that set it apart from the usual re-make / sequellization Movie of the comic book story type of movie?

Worsts - Blanket award to all of Hollywood for the misdemeanour of serial sequelization and less than inspired 're-making' - Why don't cha read a few books and get some new Ideas, SF has buckets of ideas!

Science

Bests - lots of developments, too many to list, progress everywhere is a 'best'. Discontinuation of the Science strangling Bush Administration (notably restrictive on Climate Change and Stem Cell research etc)

Worsts - The simplistic way that Some Greenish groups have been handling 'Greenhouse' as their mandate to oppose, rather than an obligation to promote some Greener or less harmful on balance energy options. The handling of the GM issue, are we getting the best possible GM introductions or is it all 'politics' between the pro and anti sides of a debate?

Darwin Prize Nominees? The Northern Rivers 'Alternative' minded population whose anti-vaccination ideology has driven down some local area baby vaccination statistics to third world levels (!) and has seen the return of localized epidemics and increases in child mortality!

Garry's Notes from the Infinitas Bookshop SF&F Discussion meeting of Thursday February 5, 2009.

Discussion Topic: 'Your Best and Worst 2008 SF, Sci-Fi, Movies & TV

Present were; Darryl Addams, Henry Chatroop, Garry Dalrymple, Dru, Kurt Frank, Michael Ousley, Susan Smith, Charmain Spears and Brian Walls.

A bit delayed getting out of work as a consequence of workplace re-organisation, so I would have arrived a bit after 7 pm for this the first of 2009's Infinitas bookshop SF&F discussion meetings, part way through proceedings

that Brian Walls was making an effort to keep on Topic. I had intended to bring wine along to this meeting, but failed to organise it in time. Considering that this was the week that Sydney got it's share of 'Forty plus' weather, Nine people at a first meeting of the year is a good start. This meeting was organised slightly differently to the Sydney Futurians meeting on the same topic. It was a round for best / worst Books then a round for Movies etc. rather than each person spilling their individual best / worst for the year and then on to the next person for their observations, seemed less efficient, some 'well I can't remember seeing a movie....' Responses etc. So here is an unattributed collation of what I heard being suggested on the night.

The Meeting noted the recent deaths of several Sci-Fi significant figures; **Majel Barret Roddenbury**, **Patrick McGoohan**, **Ricardo Montalban** and someone else (possibly the guy who did the voice of the Robot in 'Lost in Space?'). See **Ansible** for full details.

Television

Good - '**Battlestar Galactica**', good because episodes from seasons 1 and 3 are self contained

'**Being Human**', about life in (a not so unusual) share household inhabited by a Vampire, a Werewolf and a Ghost, said to be humorous, John Birmingham consulted? '**Dexter**', a rare highlight in a lean year for Sci-Fi like detective dramas.

'**The Dresden Files**', (was this on real late at night?)

'**Ghost Whisperer**', about a Psychic Medium Detective (therefore completely inspired by wishful thinking style Fantasy?) of late more unexpected twists in it's story lines.

'**Life on Mars**', the UK version, judgement suspended on the US re-make, scene for scene or 'updated and re-interpreted' for a US audience?

'**Psych**', the first of a trend, a pretend Psychic Detective who actually relies on logic and observation, but finds it easier / more acceptable to claim 'psychic' insights.

('The Mentalist' and 'Lie to Me' are programs with a similar theme).

'**Eli Stone**', a detective with a form of limited and highly subjective future vision. It goes a bit beyond 'Psychic Detective' themes, lurching toward exploring real SF, Alternate History tropes? Much more satisfying than '**Ghost Whisperer**'.

'**Dr Who**', nearly universal nomination, Stories, Companions and a Doctor that we were prepared to wait and watch week by week.

Bad - '**Fringe**', CSI / Sci-Fi / Mad Scientist Detective that was a bit too far pitched to satisfy **X-File** type expectation. Several comments along the lines of initial interest and then we lost interest. Not helped by jumping gene styled appearance times!

'**Battlestar Galactica**', Not so good because the Cylons had a plan, once, then lost it, then discovered the art of bickering to make up for this. Sort of like the garrison Orcs in **LOTR** after they captured Frodo? Our natural sympathy for the Cylons (given how pathetic the humans were) has been lost by their constant bickering. Everything is so hopeless for the humans, why bother watching more, continuing Emo appeal only?

Movies

Good - (I may have arrived at this meeting after most Movie nominations had been done) **'Superhero Movie'**, funny and about the lives of 'real life' Super heroes.

'The Day the Earth Stood Still', they kept the name, they did say **'Klaatu Barada Nikto Gort!'**, but otherwise a different movie?

'A Quantum of Solice', not great Bond, but it had it's moments

Bad - **'The Day the Earth Stood Still'**, Why, just Why?

'The Invasion of the Body Snatcher's', (fourth version!) with 'our' Nicole Kidman.

Book

Good - (yes some of this group do read from time to time!) **The Day Watch, Night Watch Trilogy**, some meaning expected to have been lost in translation from the original Russian, or is it intentional 'other worldly ness'?

Ira Levin's 'This Perfect Day', deeper and further than 1984, a four act play of suppression and revolt compared to 1984's one act play. All done by Drugs and by appealing to people's higher motivations than the threat of crude brutality.

Bad - **Vladimir Nabokov's 'Lolita'**.

Other

Best Play - **'QED'**, where Richard Feynman explains Quantum Physics

Best Musical - Joss Weedon's **'Dr Horrible'**, the sing along blog of a would be Evil Villain / Mastermind

Comments and conclusions - Did No One have a kind word / thought about **'Heroes'** the alleged great new thing Comic book heroes to Mainstream TV viewing?

I watched the first series with diminishing interest and then lost all interest when the second series and it's 'every one who was good is now bad' shark jump plot turn.

Next month's discussion topic will be: **'Superheroes'**

Garry's Notes from the Dr Who Tavern Meeting, Friday Feb. 6, 2009, Town Hall Hotel, Newtown

The first Dr Who tavern meeting for the year. I arrived at 7.30, having been delayed by work place re-structure complications.

There were about a dozen people attending, several I recognised from last year's Freecon. Most people present were involved in something of a committee meeting, something to do with Dr Who club administration and about the upcoming Davidson appearances or the next issue (#201) of Dr Who Data Entry?

A convenient innovation this night was that the Whovian table had by the addition of newcomers extended to be within reaching distance to the cash register / servery

hatch. I.e. when my high tech drinks coaster started to disco light and bump and grind (heaven forfend that I had slipped it into a pocket and forgotten about it) I didn't have to get up to get my plate of Fish and Chips (\$13, Muddy flavoured fish, over browned chips, I've had more and better at half the price at Whovian Drummoyne RSL Club events). **Stephen Bingle's** Babylon 5 (sound track) CD was admired, if nothing else it makes an attractive drink coaster!

A double coincidence of the night was that I encountered **Melanie Grogan** and a party of other Ex WA SF fans in exile, one of whom was sufficiently interested in Dr Who to come over to our table and talk with us a while. An industry professional and an employee of Wetta Studios (past/present?), he has a TV project, about the lives and loves of a Sydney Goth household that will shortly be in production / on air. His son is a (second generation) Dr Who fan. It seems that this sort of behaviour is now 'Cool'. Oh! How easy the life of the young and fannish is these days. In our day we were looked down upon and persecuted for our fannish ways He (the father) also has an admirable / formidable collection of Sci-Fi collectibles, possibly investment grade? Attempts were made to furnish this chap with an application form and a copy of the Colour issue 200 of Dr Who Data Entry (Mine's still at the PO Box?), eventually an email was passed over for future contact.

I played an audience / colour consultant role to some Thomas the Tank engine colouring-in activity (not a Dr Who Colouring in book for fairly obvious reasons) by a mother and child, second generation, while there was a discussion of Short story competitions and Dr Who Video nights.

Left the hotel a bit before 9 pm. Just missed one 423 and as a result was among a crowd of other would be public transport users who were to be serenaded for half an hour or so by an impatient woman of an age to be suffering the onset of middle age in-public-social-invisibility who had had a bit much to drink, who alternately sang and demanded to know why she was still waiting.

A bit like that scene in 1984 where Winston and the prole woman are sharing a waiting room bench? And the passing crowd just averted their eyes and walked on to enjoy their warm Sydney Summer Friday night. Ah! Sydney, you come for the climate and you stay for the Free Street theatre.

Notes from the Sydney Futurian meeting of Friday Feb. 20, 2009, Topic; Parasites & Symbionts

Present were - **Garry Dalrymple, Dianne Fox and Kevin McKern** Apologies received - **Stephen Bingle, John Fox and Paolo Rech**

News

SB - Going back to Melbourne soon, but he did give us these Babylon 5 Music CDs/DVDs

GD - Currently reading **Niel Stephenson's** 'Diamond Age', possibly the only 'Cyberpunk' writer still writing identifiably cyberpunk stories?

DF - Attended a meet a Writer and readings at Varuna, the Blue Mountains 'Writers Retreat'. The Guest Writer was **Kate Thompson**, an Irish writer of Harry Potter like Fantasy. Currently reading 'The Beguilers' by **Kate Thompson**.

KMcK - Currently reading some 'borderline' SF, most recently several books by **Jeff Baines** including 'The Sex Gates', where a mysterious alien artefact is discovered. It has the property of granting regeneration, step in old or injured and near death, emerge in the best of health and young, only it changes blokes into shielas and vice-a-versa. Sex change / alternation as a path to immortality? Many obvious cross gender issues not explored, i. e. sex linked genetic diseases like haemophilia, live carrier as an old woman, bleed to death on the spot as a 'fit' young man on leaving the machine! Etc.

No first run Sci-Fi TV to speak of at the moment apart from the currently Time and Space Travelling 'Lost' series, re-runs of Dr Who and 'Life on Mars'

Discussing the topic, Parasites and Symbionts

Firstly, where do you draw the line between a Parasite and a Symbiont?

- In 'Dark Skies' and 'Star Gate SG1' the Symbiont is very similar, an eel like thing. In Dark Skies the thing infests the Greys (short grey aliens) who seem to be running a clandestine war against Earth, in SG1 the Greys are our friends, the Asgard, and the **Go'uld** inhabit and control humans, giving them health and life greater expectancy, until body swap time. A complicating exception are the **Tok Ra**, rebels who are Symbiont and Human as partners in a resistance struggle against the Go'uld System lords. The Tok Ra are symbionts, the Go'uld are parasites.

- In one of **David Brin's** 'Uplift War' series of books we meet the **Jophur Rings**, waxy stack like disc creatures, organic chemists of note and decent citizens among the hidden races. Growing additional rings increases their abilities and sentience. Their Nasty Planet enslaving cousins arrive and drop 'controlling rings' on top of them, which turns them into Jophur. The controlling rings are 'same flesh' but different personality, Parasites or Symbiont?

- The Watchmaker Moties from **Larry Niven** and **Gerry Pournelle's** 'Moties' series of books, possibly a subspecies / symbiont of the more intelligent Moties?

- This point emerged after a discussion of the Alien parasite / symbionts described in 'The White Queen'. Each alien has a host of little bugs, they make useful stuff for their aliens, just like we use bacteria to make Cheese, Beer and Bread. They arrived on Earth in an inflatable and biodegradable Space Shuttle (neat!) and are intent on a land swindle, i.e. they promise (but have no intention of delivering) technology and diplomatic recognition in

exchange for land which they sell off for real wealth etc. So the Real Estate Agent, another form of alien Parasite?

Candidates for the Best Known Science Fiction Parasite/Symbiont?

- **The Face hugger** from 'Aliens' series of movies, through the four movies a predator / parasite moving towards a more benign form as the final Riley?

- **The Babel fish** from 'The Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy', by **Douglas Adams**, a symbiont that excretes clear communication and consequently has caused more death, suffering and destruction than any other invention in the history of life!

Controlling Parasites There have been Four movies made of 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' parasites that control people, at times a metaphor for Communism (they look like us but they are ruled by *Them!*) or Drugs?
- In Babylon 5 the Shadows control people by use of invisible to others parasites.

Avenging Parasites? In **H. G. Wells** 'The War of the Worlds' humanity is saved by Earths Germs (parasites?) doing in the invader. Particularly so as they feed on (human) blood, presumably contaminated by human harmless viruses etc.

- A **Brian Aldiss** Short Story, time travelling big game hunter ignores instructions to get up close for that perfect shot. Kills his Dinosaur but is inundated and done in by the host of slashing and bloodsucking parasites fleeing the dying Dinosaur in search of a new food source!

Parasites at war? **Christopher Rowley's** 'Star Hammer', introduces the Vang, the staring entity of three or four subsequent stories. The discovery and use of the Star Hammer device is Earth's only hope to throw off rule by the Alien (but beautiful and cultured?) Laowan. (Is there anything worse than being ruled by an alien race that is better than you are?) In 'Star Hammer' the virus / parasite / germ like Vang have for millennia besieged the Star Hammer device, a weapon created by a now extinct Frog like race. The Star Hammer converts kilometre sized cubes of planetary matter into the energy to destroy Suns / Planets. The Vang were a military weapon, capable of taking over Flesh or Computers etc., sort of like the Borg but without the Anthropomorphism? Other Vang books include 'The Battle Master' and 'The War for Eternity', mostly they are 'discovery of ancient inactive Vang' then the Vang re-emerges and it / their potential powers are explored. Sort of like 'Curse of the Mummy' etc? 'The Founder' is a Vang-Free novel by **Christopher Rowley**. There would have be other War stories within SF that deal with Germs used in war, but this is perhaps a topic for other nights?

An imaginary but very useful Symbiont?

In the book 'Next of Kin' also known as 'The Space Willies', by **Eric Frank Russell** is an exploration of the extremes of this topic. The Willies are an imaginary human Symbiont, invented by a Prisoner of War. This human captive invents a wrathful imaginary friend, the companion of all humans. The Aliens are unable to detect it, although they

believe that they are under attack from the Willies. They eventually declare an end to Human Alien hostilities to get the Willies off their case!

'Blood Music', by **Greg Bear**? A supercomputer emerges from an assembly of Leucocytes and soil bacteria etc. Smuggled out of the lab by a researcher whose funding is cut, injected into his own bloodstream! Wot! No false bottomed briefcase or slender glass vial hidden in the spine of a book! It takes over the bloke and the world, making us all better than we could be, a biological singularity / uplift event.

On the other hand, Humans as parasites?

- There is the **Damon Knight** short story about a party of explorers despatched by a nasty Fascist regime. The fall onto / into a vast amoeba like creature that digests them, but maintains their consciousness and central nervous systems. They are four brains in a blob, the anti regime guys end up in control and face the ethical dilemma, they could send the blob to digest the regime and everyone under it, so they could live 'free' in the blob, or they could tolerate the totalitarian regime.

- An implication of **Lovelock's 'Gaia Hypothesis'**, all life on Earth is connected and interdependent. What we are doing to the Planet suggests that we are currently parasites rather than Symbionts?

- A better class of Parasite is the one encountered in a Blakes 7 episode. Zzzzzil is a philosophical sort of parasite, drawing sustenance from the Gaia like planet, discusses the reality of 'existence' with Blake as the unstable surface of the planet breaks up.

- We all live and benefit from a symbiotic relationship with our gut flora, E. Coli, Billions of them. Is Humanity just a convenient construct to carry about the 'ruling' E. Coli.?

- A Short story by **Bruce Sterling 'The Swarm'**, where an Asteroid houses an ancient hive life form with very useful worker mites who make stuff for the hive. An 'Entrepreneur' has plans to rip off some worker mites for their useful DNA as in bio-prospecting. The Prospector and girlfriend get caught, the hive mind says 'thanks for your DNA, we can do this gently or roughly'. All the other worker mites were originally ensnared in the same way and their DNA taken in and adapted to fit the Hive's needs.

Some Real life SF like Parasites!

- A worm that frequently infests a huntsman spider 'coring it out' and leading it to water so it can leap out to breed. The worm can be 2 or 3 times the size of the spider.

- 'Something Gondii', infects cats (and SF fans who own cats). It affects their behaviour making them more promiscuous and risk taking, all the better to spread the 'Something Gondii'.

Star Trek examples of Parasite / Symbionts

- **The Jelly Butterfly things**, all the people of a planetary colony have gone missing, some piloted a suicidal Star ship flight into a Sun shouting 'Free, Free at last!' . These parasites were UV averse and the colony survivors had all speeded themselves up so as to be able to escape these parasites, their speech transferring to ultrasonic frequencies. Spock caught a dose of the parasite and

was freed from it only by blindingly bright UV radiation (he got better though!). Classic Star Trek

- **The Trill**, Slug like and long lived, they are transferred from host to host as their knowledge and several lifetimes worth of life experiences are useful. Hosts get to pass on their memories and experience those of past hosts. STNG and DS9.

- **The Botany Bay 'earwigs'** of movie 'The Wrath of Khan', scorpion like things that are stuck in your ear making you amenable to commands. 'Classic' Star Trek movie.

- **The Things that took over star fleet**, in an STNG episode, parasites with wiggly tail / breathing tubes sticking out of your neck have taken over Star Fleet HQ. Riker affected a fake wiggly tail / breathing tube to get the cabal's confidence and defeat the Hive Queen? There are probably other episodes / stories as well.

Other aspects of Parasite and Symbiontism?

Vampirism, I mean the bloodsuckers are living off us aren't they.

- In **Brian Lumley's 'Wampiri'** series of books Vampirism is caused by an alien infection, the more / longer you carry the infection the stronger and stranger your powers are.

- In **Walter Miller Jr's** short story 'mmmmm' in an Anthology, capsules with writing on them are received on Earth as a gift from space by a race who were wiped out by a Supernova. The capsules also contain spores that infect humans, turning their skin grey. The infected are hunted down and killed. This 'disease' makes you more intelligent, sensitive and touchy feelie. Only a religious community has the discipline to be able to live with the infection, study it dispassionately and care for the infected or uninfected survivors.

- Do we count Social and Economic Parasite / Symbiontism? Are Criminals, Aristocrats, other Ruling classes or the Church (see **Philip Pullman?**) Parasites or Symbionts to the rest of civilisation?

Garry's notes from the March 5, 2009 Infinitas SF&F Discussion meeting, Topic: Super Heroes

Present were; Henry Chatroop, Garry Dalrymple, Dru, Kurt Frank, Mick Ousley, and Wayne from Wollongong. **Apologies were received** from Daryl Addams (unwell) and Brian Walls (work commitments)

News items discussed included:

HC - Amongst it's other crimes against humanity **Zimbabwe's Mugabe regime** may be denying the world access to **historic Dr Who episodes**. It was sent a full set of original episodes in the 1960s, what has become of them?

- **Gravity waves** may have been detected in 1987, as a result of **Supernova 1987A**, it has recently been discovered that apparently the conditions were just right to have registered gravity waves, some thing was noticed at the time on a prototype gravity wave telescope, but the observer died in 2007 and records are not available?

- **French and UK Nuke submarines collide** at sea, noises

of the collision possibly mistaken for routine whale humping?

- **Clive Cussler** has just finished losing \$5 million in a court case trying to unsuccessfully separate his name from the movie 'Sahara' (Civil War Ironclad full of Confederate Gold lost in the Sahara Desert). He lost the court case, had to pay costs etc., apparently.

- **Satellites Collide!** A deceased Soviet Satellite and an **Iridium** Satellite have collided, spraying space shrapnel widely, more damage expected to occur as the debris field orbits Earth's poles.

- **Google** wants to digitise all known books, and is prepared to pay some sort of royalties, a plethora of 'are you an author previously known as' Advertisements have been issued. This could be a 'Good Thing' if it makes available out of print SF, but the intellectual property issues are obvious.

GD - The World nearly ended on Monday night, with a 35 metre Asteroid passing between Earth and the Moon's orbit (55,000 miles / Kilometres) probably would have made a crater and a tsunami if it splashed down, but not really a Planet killer. No 24 hour alert warning issued. The Asteroid was spotted by a US funded project at the Siddings Springs Anglo Australian Observatory, Coonabarrabarran NSW, a project de-funded by the late Howard government.

Dru - Rendered an extended appreciation / review of the 'Prototype Me' program on SBS, from the 'Mythbusters' people verdict, entertaining, but not enough disclosed to help to allow DIY enthusiasts, possibly more will be disclosed as extras in the inevitable DVD set.

MO - Tours with Sydney appearances by STNG's Levar Burton and Ex Dr Who Peter Davidson, also Supernova in June.

BW - Philip Jose Farmer, (the original three name SF author?) has died. Brian points out that PJF was 'into' Super Heroes in a big way. PJF is I suppose in the running for a Freecon Ghost of Honour slot.

Sci-Fi TV?

Thin pickings of late, Good Weather for reading? There are Dr Who repeats on ABC, US version 'repeats' of 'Life on Mars' and animated Star Wars Clone wars episodes on Saturday morning TV. Personally I think 'Is there life on Mars' is just McCloud re-imagined, the incidental adventures of a copper with a mode of investigation from the past / future blows into the big City essentially to solve one big mystery but helps solve a crime an episode due to his quaint crime fighting skills And then he can go home?

There are apparently several phantom, unadvertised TV channels out there on the HD spectrum, including presumably TV Free Albamuth? (**Philip K Dick** reference)

Onto the Topic; Super Heroes

On topic discussion was a bit thin tonight, as you would expect when the main proponent / enthusiast for the night's topic rings in an apology. That's you Brian.

Super Heroes 'Started' with Superman etc. Comic books then Radio, Movie Matinee serial fodder and finally TV episodes and most lately 'retro' Blockbuster SFX movies featuring the re-cycling of almost every known Name Super Hero of the golden age of comics.

All the Super Heroes we have heard about are crime fighters, Warren Buffet may have 'Super' powers, but he doesn't wear the cape or fight crime, so he can't be a 'Super Hero'.

Most Super Heroes are migrants, from elsewhere, but they have a strong attachment to the welfare of citizens of Earth. Super Heroes by definition fight crime and are opposed each episode by an 'equal but opposite' Super Villain or Criminal Mastermind. We discussed the motivation of the Super Villain or Criminal Mastermind, they always get beaten by the Superhero, episode after episode. We resolved that there is some fairly heavy Dole type requirement on Super Villain or Criminal Masterminds, i. e. to get their fortnightly benefit they have to fill out a diary each week giving details of numerous attempts to succeed at Super Villain or Criminal Mastermind type criminal endeavours.

All Super Heroes have both a public reputation and Super Powers, there might be Cryptic Super Heroes out there (like Librarians), but we never hear about them.

Super Heroes tend to be localised rather than Planet ranging in their 'Fight for Right' otherwise, as the world turns, when would they get any sleep

An early trend was for Super Heroes to have a vulnerability, Superman and Kryptonite, Bat Man and his 'only human' Bruce Wayne identity etc. Also, usually an unfortunate life history that compelled them to fight for good. Why Bruce Wayne keeps a boy in a cave and needs a secret life where he dresses up in black leather etc. was left undiscussed, as a sign of respect for the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras which takes place this weekend.

All Super Heroes have to have a cape, tights and other merchandisable accoutrements.

Super Heroes used to be lone warriors fighting for good, since the 1980 Superheroes have come in teams, much better to sell the movies, more opportunity for Super Hero Soap Opera stuff.

Communist nations with government inspired leadership personality cults had no time to allow Super Heroes into their popular culture.

Super Heroes used to be icons of good, now both mocked and revived in popular culture ('Living Together' and the UK TV show with All Super Heroes coming from Ultron)

A reason why Super Heroes are Super is because they can do *what we wish we could do*, powers without limits?

The Super Heroes depicted in the new movie 'The Watchman' are 'parallel Universe' style clones of well known brand Superheroes. The writer wanted to get into and lay bare the twisted minds of some Super Heroes, but was warned that doing it to existing properties would result in a tide of litigation, result a movie filled with 'you know who', substitute Super Heroes.

Some Super Heroes, or treatments of 'Super Heroe-ness' we discussed include; Superman Bat Man, Iron Man, Wonder Woman (when she flies in her invisible plane does she wear radar avoiding stealth undies or does she fly 'commando style?') America's Greatest Hero, The Tick, Harvey Birdman at Law, Heroes (Super powers, but not Super Heroes?), X Men. All fodder for pop culture

Next month's topic: SF stories that feature Astronomy

Some Science Fiction Book Reviews

ISBN 0-7499-3815-3 Full Moon Rising,

by **Keri Arthur Aust**, 357 pages, © 2006

Read December 29 to 31, 2008

How to genre type this one? It is hard to come to a conclusion as this book runs over / overlaps several genres that I read only infrequently. Crime Detective and 'Supernatural Romance' are two possibilities. I picked this book up to read as it's writer is a 'soon to be big thing' Australian Author and as she has been GOH'd at a recent Speculative Fiction event.

The story is set in and around Melbourne (No surprise there, lots of Melbournites seem to reflexively wear black / shun the Sun etc.). Someone is bumping off the City's Vampire Guardians, an institution set up to Police (and terminate) the Vampire and 'other-folk' who break the rules that allow 'Other-folk' to freely mix with human society. Synthetic Blood is available on tap and all the previously hidden 'other-folk' are free to contribute to society in their 'other' ways. The Main character is an employee of a Guardians and initially she is worried that her twin brother is missing in action. She sets out to investigate on her own behalf but soon gets swept up into the full Guardians led investigation. The story mostly turns on an investigation into who is turning out cloned hybrid Vampire / Werewolf / Other who are being used as hit men. There is a Science Fictional fig leaf in there somewhere, as all the traditional supernatural / demonic baggage of Vampirism etc has been jettisoned, we are after all talking about 'Otherness' caused by differences in genetic code. We get to meet the main character's twin brother (and his two gay Werewolf boyfriends), the Main character's two werewolf steady boyfriends (Both Millionaire businessmen) her Vampire boss, her new Vampire Boyfriend / potential soul mate (a Billionaire businessman!) and assorted natural or lab manufactured 'other' folk. Although the 'Other-folk' of this story are all well and truly liberated from the Christian / European vampire tradition, they do however seem to be very well acquainted with the gospel of Prosperity.

A major surprise to me in reading this book was that it isn't that it wasn't so much about Vampires. They are there, as characters, but the book is mostly about being a Werewolf, or more correctly a '**Dhampire**' a half-Werewolf half-Vampire type of person, mixed abilities etc. Oh dear, the Sex! I suppose I really should explain that this book has lots of sex acts in it. To be a Werewolf is apparently a license to be oversexed, just as Vampirism is to be sexually charged and rich. Come Full Moon week, say goodbye to your werewolf work colleagues because they are all off having sex, all seven days and seven nights. Apparently all Vampires are wealthy, and good in bed. I would have thought this completely off the chain sexuality would have been an impediment to career progress of the upwardly mobile Were-folk, but not so apparently?

Conclusion - It would be a subversive and possibly irresponsible act to recommend this book as a 'next read' to the fair maidens who are currently being swept up in the **Stephanie Meyer** 'vegetarian' vampire phenomena, although Keri Arthur's Vampires are probably as 'realistic' as Stephanie Meyer's it really is a different take on Vampires. That they are Australian Vampires doesn't really matter that much. Does it make it as a 'Feminist'

Supernatural romance? There is one strong Female character, the book is about her, but there doesn't seem much room for any other female characters.

ISBN 0-450-01549-1, Pirates of the

Asteroids, Book 2 of the David (Lucky)

Starr Space Ranger series, by Isaac

Asimov US (deceased), 144 pages,

© 1952. Read Dec 29 to 31, 2008

Trouble in the Asteroid belt? Pirates attacking shipping, suspicions that the Sirians are up to old tricks, supporting a rising of the Asteroid dwelling folk against Earth's Empire that will allow the Sirians in to conquer Earth?

These Lucky Starr / Space Ranger books these days something of a curiosity, the 1950s language and technology assumptions are a bit anachronistic, but each is a short novel and they are both a Space Opera tale and a Detective story. In this one, David Starr has to infiltrate the Space Pirates.

Star Ship chases, Space Battles etc. occur. Also by a process of deduction he identifies the chief pirate _and also the killer of his Father_. He and his Martian sidekick save Earth yet again in less than 150 pages.

Conclusion - I'm tempted to ask why this sort of (dated) book can't be re-written and re-issued as a YA adventure rather than angst teen Fantasy / Identity quest books. © GPD 20Jan09

ISBN 1-85723-850-8 Heads,

by **Greg Bear US**, 147 pages, © 1990

Another Short SF novel, very nearly a Novella length story. The story starts as a ho-hum story about a bloke whose Sister and Brother-in-law are into a research project to reach Absolute Zero. They are members of a family living on the Moon as settled by a Robert Heinlein like society of Pioneer Free Enterprise Colonists. The quest for Absolute Zero is actually a justification or a convenience for what becomes the mainline of the story, the heads,

cryogenically preserved human remains, that Sister of main character would like to scan and be able to read back their memories. This consignment of 410 frozen heads includes the Sibling's great grandparents and founder of their influential family corporation / clan, however there are also three undocumented heads and these are the cause of the book's conflict. The President of the Moon's ruling council wants this project stopped immediately! This President is the representative of a family /corporation of members of a particular religion. Join the dots, Old heads, Religion, motivation to halt the experiment. Someone doesn't want 'dead men' to tell tales!

Essentially it is a story about what the heirs to a bogus religious organisation will do when there is a threat that the un-moderated thoughts of their founder figure might become public knowledge. The 'Religion' involved is very clearly Scientology only slightly updated. I found this disappointing, because as soon as that penny drops, any suspense also goes away. You just know that bad things are going to happen, you are along for the ride at this point

only to find out what sort of bad and how soon. The Absolute Zero experiment sort of works and weird things happen just after the Church attempts to Bunker bust bomb the experimental site. Heads, Sister and Brother-in-law all get sucked into a new form of matter, a realm where information is matter or something.

Conclusion - Overall an OK read in spite of the problems listed above. © GPD 03Oct08

ISBN 0-345-01950-4, Natives of Space, An anthology of three short stories by **Hal Clement US**, 156 pages, stories © 1942, 1943 and 1946. Collection printed 1965

Real Old Science Fiction, before 'pulp' was left behind and 'Hard' Science Fiction was invented as a distinct subgenre?

Assumption unjustified © 1946 – An 'interesting' rather than a satisfying SF story from 1946. A husband and wife pair of aliens on a bit of a holiday, stop off on backwater Earth, for no particularly clear reason, guided by a somewhat out of date 'Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy' style guide to Earth. Again for no particularly clear reason 'He' needs a blood transfusion from an Earthling, so they abduct one, after conducting tests / medical experiments and take a large blood sample. Trouble is that their guide is out of date and lacking in detail. They inadvertently drain a child of a quantity of blood that an Adult could tolerate, a child that is already running a strep infection! The child is returned (with a story to tell?) and the story concludes with the Aliens discussing the need to update Earth references in the Galactic literature and the need to upgrade Earth's Galactic status in light of their experiences of Earth's current level of technological attainments and the need for formal 'First Contact' and possibly resident 'consular' representation. This story was written / copyrighted before the 1947 'Flying Saucer' flap, pre Roswell etc. I can see about half a dozen aspects of 'Classic' UFO encounter in this short story! This may be the seminal text for a whole genre of 'true' UFO experienter stories.

Technical Error © 1943 - Not a SF story to modern tastes. A bunch of blokes get stranded on an Asteroid because they have 'fried' their prototype spacecraft into a heap of glittering slag. Fortunately they have picked the one Asteroid with a long abandoned Alien Spaceship on it to be stranded on. This Hugo shaped star ship appears to be 'identical' to their own – What odds? – which they discover after an hour of Asteroid walking into their 100 hour air supply. They enter and explore the Marie Celeste like Alien spacecraft with hopes of getting her going or at least sending off some sort of signal to potential rescuers. They figure a few things out and manage to start an engine, which converts this ship to glittery slag as well! Fortunately the exhaust plume from this is noticed and the castaways are rescued, empty handed. Ultimately this is a story that lacks the confidence of more recent Science Fiction, the confidence to speculate on what might happen if the alien spacecraft and it's technology can be recovered intact. It also displays some pre-Star Trek techno-babble about star ship engines. Again broken down space ship, empty handed storytellers after the encounter with 'others' technology, UFO experienter staples.

Impediment © 1942 – A party of hive insect-like Aliens land, seek out a lone human with the intention of commencing trade? Why? It emerges that they are out of Ammunition, a serious impediment to their intentions of a career in Piracy!

Points for keeping this point in suspense and double plus points for the point of the story, the difficulties that these 'Alien' minded Aliens have in communicating with Humans coz of different mind and social norms. These Aliens DO NOT get to conquer Earth, and just couldn't conceive why they would want to – very impressive in a quiet way for a 1942 SF story, 'Bug Eyed Monsters', not people in bug suits.

ISBN 0-671-87656-2, The Faery Convention, by **Brett Davis US**, 281 pages, ©1995 A book based on a single conceit, a reversal of the SF trope of the 'Wainscoting Fiction'?

The conceit is that the American Civil rights movement of the 1960s was so empowering and inclusive that not just the African American and the Gay American emerged from discrimination, but the whole range of mythological creatures Elves, Pixies, Dragons, Wizards, Yowies, Centaurs and Mermaids etc. also emerged from the shadows to demand their place in the greater American Society.

Or nearly so, as American Society as depicted in the book has great difficulty dealing with the mythological people's ability to do magic, which is now proscribed by law and other restrictions.

The action of this book revolves around and great convention to resolve the Magic issue. The solution on offer is a reservation, between Texas and Okalahoma where the mythological may freely practise their culture / magic out of sight of mainstream America. Just like a White Aryan separatist homeland, cute? Amid all the compromises and Washington DC politics, someone is killing off the delegates and threatening the success of the treaty convention.

Much running around as the convention fails, a homicidal shape changer and his Centaur girlfriend takes over the body of the US President and all the other mythological folk disappear back into the woodwork. Game reset

Conclusion; Not a book I would re-read a vaguely interesting account of a Science Fiction story structure using Fantasy book characters. For genre ranging completists who have a need to read 'one of everything' only, about the only lasting impression I finished the book with was 'how do Centaurs manage to have sex?' Horses for courses I guess? © GPD March 2009

ISBN 0-586-03374-2, Echo Round His Bones, by **Thomas M. Disch US (Deceased)**, 127 pages, © 1969.

The Ultimate in Wainscoting Fantasy done as Science Fiction? In this story a matter transporting machine is in

use, the Americans have a base on Mars and the Russians have one on the Moon. Each is armed with their nation's arsenal of Nukes.

Out of Rocket range, each base is linked to Earth by a matter transmitter machine for Food, Air, Water and personnel.

The problem with this is that each use of the matter transmitter produces an 'echo', of men and material who no longer strongly interact with ordinary matter. The book is the story of one of these Echo men and his adventures on an Earth where he can 'swim' through steel and concrete. The book could be seen as being 'hard' Science Fiction as it deals with the practical difficulties of living as an echo, with much exposition on the 'Science' of the transmitter Echo effect and its consequences for the Echo matter it creates.

On the other hand there is a lot of exploration of the imperfect mental state of most main characters in the story, as you would expect in a 'Literary' novel? The point of view character, a conscientious Army Captain, has been sent to Mars with sealed orders, a letter instructing 'Nuke the Earth by June, unless otherwise ordered'.

How does an insubstantial being left back on Earth stop the end of the world? Answer, get 'in character' and teleport the Earth elsewhere, leaving an echo Earth behind, costs you the Moon though! © GPD 30September 2008

ISBN 0-7497-2303-3, Uncle Vampire, by Cynthia D. Grant US, 151 pages, © 1993

A curious book, when is a Vampire not a Vampire, when he's something worse! As we are doing Vampires for the Freecon I thought it would be a good idea to read a bit of what passes for vampire books these days. This very slender book, '19 Chapters', each with a page wasting interleaf and 30 mm margin at the bottom of the page is a Vampire book coz the point of view character tells you that her uncle is a Vampire, usually on every page. Slight evidence is produced for Vampirism through the book and Dream/nightmare interludes make it less easy to figure out what is going on, although the thought that there might be a 'sex predator' involved is with you from page two coz the Vampire angle is just so lacking in substance. I guess it would be harder to sell or place on a school library shelve a book titled 'My Uncle Sex the offender'. In spite of the worthy goal, of encouraging children to do in your family sex offender, and to counteract the frequently counterproductive 'stranger danger' sex offender paradigm I'm not sure that this is 'fair', the main character's family is depicted as clearly dis-functional and I feel that this undercuts the presumptive message that 'these things do happen, ask for help, you will be believed'. I hope that there are better and clearer books about this issue about, as this book fails to satisfy on several levels, I got the feeling that the point of view character was a nutcase rather than a real person in a troubled 'ordinary' family. © GPD 03Oct08

ISBN 0-340-68918-8, Stars and Stripes forever (Book 1 of the Trilogy), by Harry Harrison US / Ire, 320 p. © 1998

The cover blurb informs that Harry Harrison is an expert on

the US Civil War. He may well be, but I found this to be a fairly predictable Alternate History story starting with the American Civil War and the Trent incident, where the US Navy stops a British ship in International waters and takes two Confederate envoys prisoner, provoking British wrath. In this version Prince Albert does NOT rise from his deathbed to change the wording of his Empress wife's 'un-diplomatic' response to the Trent incident. This allows a punitive raid to be staged by the British against a Yankee Blockade supporting garrison, only it isn't, it's actually the Confederate port of Biloxi that suffers a British 'Blitzkrieg' and subsequently soldiers on the loose behaving badly against defeated civilians. This caused an armistice in the Civil War to avenge this action and then a decision to unite against a common enemy, the perfidious British, Liberate the Canadians etc. Likely or possible? I'm not so sure. I found it a bit annoying that at each turn we 'Americans' were shown to be honourable and resourceful, while 'those' British were shown as blockheads and buffoons at every opportunity. I nearly expected to see Flashman advancing to the rear looking for a new coat to turn.

Verdict / Conclusion – The three books in this series lead to a battle for the 'Liberation' of Britain and Ireland. I rather wonder what sort of a world that would have caused, but I do not feel that strongly motivated to read the next two books. Heroism, blood and suffering to a known end. © GPD 06 NOV08

ISBN 0-340-68922-6, Stars and Stripes Triumphant (Book 3 of the Trilogy), by Harry Harrison US / Ire, 340 p. © 2002

Christmas End of the year time break, so I found the time to read this third instalment of the series, without bothering to search out part two. Ireland has been liberated under a Republican government, solving the 'Irish Question' and reconciling both communities with Yankee ingenuity apparently. There is an attempt on the life of President Lincoln in Belgium. Meanwhile, with the help of an Anglo Russian spy and his little boat, England's defences are mapped and future invasion plans made, an invasion that will require pitting the new yankee military technology against the assumptions of the British empire etc. With characteristic comic book stupidity (Nothing learned from Crimea or the Indian revolt?) Barking mad queen Victoria demands a war against America - And gets instead an invasion through Cornwall, that sees Gatling gun equipped land ironclads (with petrol engines!) mowing down the household cavalry in London. Scotland declares itself independent, a counter invasion fleet sails back to India, nothing much more of note happens. It would be amusing to see what Bernard Cornwall could do with a set up like this, raising a successful fighting resistance to US occupation? © GPD 20 JAN 09

No ISBN Hitler's Woman, by Antoni Gronowicz ?? , 162 pages, © 1942 Read Dec. 23 to 27, 2008 Summer time TV and reading, where would we be without Mr Hitler?

I picked this up seeing that it was published in 1942, as it would be interesting to compare what we know now to what they knew then about Hitler, his life and times.

The book implies that the writer was persecuted nearly to death before fleeing with his precious insights into Hitler's personal life! BULL DUST!. This is an appalling 'exploitation' book written with no factual basis other than that Hitler was shackled up with Eva Braun. The book starts at about 1913, Hitler's second cousin (somewhat removed) is dying. He is a Lutheran pastor with a 17 year old 'foster-daughter', actually his daughter from an affair with an actress! Before he dies he manages to write two letters one to distant cousin Adolf in Munich - I'm dying, so come marry my foster daughter, I'll fix it so the local chief of police gives you a job - and to the pastor's best friend the Police chief - If you love me, give cousin Adolf a job so he can support Eva! Hitler shows up, gets the job, chief of police dies, and after three weeks in the job Hitler gets the Police chief's old job. Hitler hunts down and kills (in a cowardly manner) the attractive Czech mountaineer who Eva has secretly fallen in love with. The book ends with Mrs and Mrs Hitler in bed as the first world war is declared! More of a cowboy western (Carpathian) story than a piece of biography of any worth.

If the writer had in fact been pursued and harassed it was probably by high minded Historians offended by this book's multiple egregious miss telling of events that were already (in 1942) well known.

This book is 'Biography' in the same way that 'Creation Science' is Science! A 17 year old Eva Braun as Mrs Hitler in 1913 or 1914 is thirty years too early and avoids any mention of Hitler's 'unfortunate' run of suicidal girlfriends, with attendant rumours of murder / incest etc. Hitler first met Eva Braun when she was a photographer's assistant during the 1930s, when he was already in power.
© GPD 31DEC08

Random Notes

The Annual Prize Giving day at St. George Girls High School, 10 am to 12 noon, Friday Dec. 12, 2008

- Light Rain, and cooler weather this year than it was last year. 400 bus to Rockdale then a ten minute walk to the school. At the bus stop across the road the 'Black watch', after 9 am commuters were out in force. Most were local widows dressed in black intent on reaching Burwood in time to catch the after 9 am bus to Rookwood to tend their loved ones aboveground internments.

- Met Ruth and her mother at the hall, Front row seats, facing the band and the returned 2007 graduates seated to my right these girls are all a twitter, 'Hey You', and catching up with each other after a thirteen month separation.

- I was handed the folder of Janene's results. All her results were good to excellent. 'Communication' skills seem to be holding her back from universal excellence though. While Janene was stationary and setting up in the band area I awarded her my 'Uncle's Special Award for Academic Excellence' a 2008 Antarctic year Silver coin. I

hope she will be encouraged to go out and explore the world for Knowledge and For Science, eating the huskies (her little dog Tim is part Husky?) is purely optional. I can't give her 'Father Love' but occasionally at these times I can do 'Uncle's indulgence'?

- The proceedings are started with the two currently 'traditional' invocations that seem to start most public events these days, Firstly, recognition of Aboriginal pre-occupation and Secondly 'Turn your mobile phones OFF!'. No mention or pictures of Her Royal Highness The Queen of the Commonwealth of Australia evident on the day. If you are going to have a C of E Saint and Knight depicted everywhere then it seems a bit churlish to fail to mention the joint head of Church and Heraldic institutions?

- Noticed that the cover of the program book features a Manga Style St. George riding a dragon. This 'St George', is depicted as being left handed. Must look up the heraldic implications of this before pointing this out to Janene (who is also left handed).

The Principal's speech

HSC results - 33% in the top 2%, many other good HSC academic outcomes listed, as you would expect. Noticed and surprised at the number and range of non-academic achievements, confirming the view that St. George is in fact a broadening experience for it's inmates and not just a 'Swot Factory'. Top Girls School for Sport, Drama activities, Community Volunteer work, Long list of Curriculum connected Art and Music achievements. Clearly at St. George Girls they aim to and deliver well rounded high achievers. Mention of Parental support, at home and through the formal in-school parent's School fundraising etc. groups.

On a sadder note, and a bit of a reality check among all the (well deserved) congratulations, among the list of departures by retirement and transfer there was mention of a the death of a much appreciated staff member, who will be remembered by an annual prize and a memorial garden. I noticed with approval that the Admin staff also got a mention, 'three cheers for team Admin Support and let's hear it for all the Minions'. I heartily agree!

Notes from Garry's Bankstown and Campsie excursion of Tuesday January 27, 2009 – A Workplace Transit, Mum's Medical appointment and a visit to the Telstra Museum

Some weeks ago mum had a minor operation, the excision of a skin lesion, requiring a post op 11 am check up at the specialist's Bankstown offices, not far from where I work. As this was the day after Australia day I took the opportunity to take my mum to work, show her the view and the people I work with, on the basis of 'first day back at school' etc. We arrived at work a bit after 9 am. Mother enjoyed meeting the people, the people enjoyed meeting me Mum. It was overcast and all that, so the view from the office windows was mostly theoretical than actual. At this time I'm prepared to go a fair way to getting my mum out of the house and interacting with people, so this chance for a workplace visit was an opportunity to be grabbed. At about 10.40 am we left the office to traipse across

Bankstown to the Doctor's offices, a ten minute walk away. The waiting room was crowded, hardly any seats left etc. The receptionist checked us off against the list and advised that 'The Doctor is in but some what behind schedule'. Rather than sit and wait for 30 to 60 minutes we decided to get out and walk around instead. A short distance down the street was the Telstra Museum, a Museum of telecommunications run by a collective of telephone enthusiasts. The Museum is only open two days a week, Tuesday and Wednesday, so we had the Museum and a volunteer to ourselves for about 40 minutes. What they have are a lot of old telephones, very illustrative of the relatively slow evolution of the mechanical and then electromechanical technologies before the explosion of transistor and integrated circuitry that occurred in the 1980s. There seemed to be slow improvements and then almost a singularity, not counting the mobile phone revolution. The Museum has a strong connection with the Morse Code enthusiasts

All of this was 'real good' for Mum, all about was technology she had used in the home and at work, the sort of stuff that her Father and Brother had to play with in the Garage and also some of the technology that my father would have brought home in case of need. All real double-plus-good associations for Mum. All going well, I have hopes of identifying and donating some garage drawer stuff to this Museum, when I can spare the time to uncover it in the garage.

We returned to the Doctor's rooms, ten minute wait, seen by a nurse and then the Surgeon, all fairly well, the lump seems to have been a reaction to an insect bite rather than a cancerous growth.

We were out of there at closer to 1 pm than to 12, so I decided to go home with mum rather than going back to work for a half day. On the way to the Station I was able to show Mother a shop, 'Rodeo Drive' a second hand clothes shop, stock imported from the US. The Proprietor was not in, but his daughter was. For some years I had the stall next to his at Glebe Market, where he was selling the same stuff as in his shop, Logo-ed work and Sport shirts, jeans and jackets etc. At Campsie I persuaded Mum to accompany me to the Library, where I got a library card and Mother received a talk about the Library's (basic) introductory computer classes. There is apparently no 'Seniors Computer Club' at Campsie. As on this day I had mother outwardly focussed I wanted to carry it as far as possible. It might turn out that Mother and Greta (a friend from Church) might tag team and try to do some computer courses.

Traveller's Tales

- After visiting the Australian Museum and waiting for the 423 bus home a bloke asked me 'How's the Ambulance going?' Having mistaken frequently my neo-Amish style of dress, white shirt, black trousers and felt hat for being signs of being connected with the St John's Ambulance. A generous but erroneous attribution.

- On the way to the Dr Who meeting I had the 'joy' of sharing most of the train ride in with a middle aged transvestite who was keeping cool by propping open the carriage door with his/her boot, of course he/she was cool, with all the air conditioned air racing past him / her on the way out, sweaty for the rest of us! I do not believe you

can actually cool a train carriage to be cooler than the outside environment by letting in outside air.

- Went into Marrickville to drop off two boxes of empty CD cases, noticed at a bus **18 Greek widows** all lined up (like communion girls) waiting for a bus, not a bloke among them!

- At Marrickville Reverse garbage they have a Sunday Market, mostly farmer's produce. One young chap had set up a table and a chess set offering to play all comers for cash. No takers though, should be given recognition for developing **a new form of non-intrusive busking?**

- As you have read, in attending monthly Sydney City Skywatchers meetings at the Observatory I tend notice the variations in the numbers **homeless** living under the Harbour Bridge approaches, four or five bed rolls seen in February and March. I noticed in the SMH paper a serious attempt to count the numbers of homeless living rough in Sydney.

- The **Couriers** that do most departmental deliveries tend to be older than you would expect to be doing this at times fairly physical work. Some must be blokes whose life and employment history has left them with a need to keep working beyond the usual age cut off, no trade and a driver's license. As 'sub-contractors' I guess the job is open to all comers. After shifting and re-stacking one particularly large delivery I made one courier a cup of tea. He was surprised and I was astounded to be told that in his fifteen years in the business, this was the first time ever that he had been offered a cup of tea by people at a delivery!

- Tuesday March 10, 2009 - On the platform at Bankstown station waiting for the next train, trying to stay upwind of all the smokers. A dressed for business like woman arrives, using a mobile phone, speaking twelve to the dozen with a husky 'too many fags too young' voice, very much 'in the moment' about her business. Madam, for indeed she was a Madam, was discussing the final stages of setting up a new brothel in Bankstown. She was only on the train for a few stations, but I was able to overhear that apparently the Council inspection earlier this afternoon went very well and several 'Grand Opening' parties are planned. One for the Builders, one for people in 'The Trade' and possibly another one open to 'The Community' at large. Numerous phone calls were made issuing invitations to interested parties, possibly including the management of rival establishments and various sex worker's representative groups. 'Lillies' is apparently being set up in an industrial area on a street just off Canterbury road, offering an apparent 'United Nations' of sex workers to all who need such services. The approval of this establishment probably is a council initiative to move the focus of the local sex industry off Canterbury road and out of School and residential areas. All this while I was struggling with a Suduko puzzle, very distracting!

- Another Brothel story I know of was the Brothel that died of shame. Apparently a Brothel was operating just across the road from Naval Supply Centre Zetland, where I worked for two years in the 1980s. In spite of being adjacent to a well staffed Naval establishment and down the road from Sydney's Randwick Race Course, it just went out of business!

Basenjis Tail Piece

Amber's conduct of late has been changing over summer, more whining / growling etc. very alarming to hear, but signs of further adaptation to us, she is being very much more vocal and communicating with us rather than being silent, eye avoiding and non-communicating. Amber is more attached to mother, if allowed to, she will take up a station near to or inside mother's bedroom door when mother is having an afternoon sleep, shower or between when Mum goes to bed and I do. Amber's noises include a quite Lion like 'roar'. If we have visitors in the house she is usually silent and subdued / watchful, she retreats to the lounge room rather than outside when she feels threatened, mostly by noises from neighbour's children. She has transferred from being a 'run' dog to being an indoor dog, she goes outside only occasionally, following Mum out and for other 'essential business'.

Something of an Index

Red Pages

Pages 1 to 4 – Editorial, Mailing Comments and my reading during 2008

Green Pages

Pages 5 to 11 – Book Group meeting notes

Pages 11 and 12 – Book Group Book Reviews

Blue Pages

Pages 13 to 15 – Science and Astronomy, Sydney City Skywatchers meetings, The Leviathan of Parson's Town and Finding the Size of the Universe with SUSI

Page 16 – Science Book Reviews

Yellow Pages – SF&F meeting notes

Pages 17 to 23 – Futurian, Infinitas discussion meetings of plus one Dr Who Tavern night

Pages 23 to 26 – Book Reviews (mostly SF)

White Pages

Pages 27 and 28 – Random Notes, Traveller's Tales and Basenjis Tail Piece